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Special Issue on MASK DANCES OF ASIA



MASK DANCES OF ASIA

SPECIAL ISSUE

MASK DANCES OF ASIA

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PRASANA KUMAR DASH

Editors

ANURAG ANAND

PARK YEON-OCK

JOURNAL OF CENTRE FOR ASIAN STUDIES

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Special Issue on Mask Dance of Asia

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Editorial

In the past, special issues of *margASIA* have concentrated on the literature and cultural traditions of specific Asian nations. Our esteemed guest editors have guided readers through the rich and diverse cultural and literary landscapes of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Japan, Israel, and Malaysia. A notable past issue, guest edited by Romanian Odissi dancer and scholar Angelica Marinescu, explored various dance forms across Asia.

The forthcoming Summer 2024 issue of our journal will highlight the mask dance traditions of Asia, under the expert guidance of guest editor Prasanna Dash, a distinguished scholar and painter, and the founder of the OdiArt Centre in Odisha. We extend our profound gratitude to Mr. Dash for his invaluable efforts in curating this special issue of *margASIA*.

We are confident that readers will find the articles featured in this edition both rewarding and enriching, offering deep insights into the fascinating world of mask dance traditions across Asia.

Acknowledgements

The successful publication of this journal, *Mask Dances of Asia*, is the culmination of the collective efforts and support of numerous individuals and institutions. We extend our deepest gratitude to the esteemed scholars and researchers whose invaluable insights and expertise have significantly contributed to this volume. Their unwavering dedication to the study and preservation of mask dance traditions has greatly enriched our understanding of this cultural heritage. We particularly acknowledge the contributions of our distinguished research scholars: Prasanna Kumar Dash, Anurag Anand, Bhumika Singh, Papri Das, Dr. Tiatemsu Longkumer, Dr. So Inhwa, Prof. Son Sang-Rak, Dr. Lopamudra Maitra Bajpai, Dr. Phan Thuận Thảo, Paek Kwang Sik, and Kim In-Seong.

We express our heartfelt thanks to the cultural practitioners and artists who generously shared their knowledge and experiences, allowing us to capture the intricate details and significance of these traditions. Their commitment to preserving and promoting mask dances continues to inspire and inform our work.

We would like to express our deep appreciation for the institutions and organizations that provided essential support and resources. Our special gratitude goes to Professor Jatindra Kumar Nayak, the editor of *Marg Asia*, for offering a vital platform for the publication of this journal. The ODI ART Centre and the Chilika Shelduck International Folk Art Carnival have been instrumental in fostering cultural exchange and providing a space for the exploration and celebration of mask dances.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to IGNCA for its dedication to documenting and preserving the folklore of India, particularly the mask traditions, without which our cover page would not have been possible. We also wish to acknowledge the Centre for Research on Asian Art and Culture for their unwavering support and collaboration. Additionally, we want to recognize Prasanna Kumar Dash, the founder, and Park Yeon-ock, the international curator of the ODI ART Centre, who were key figures in making this journey successful.

We are also grateful to the editorial team, whose tireless efforts in reviewing, editing, and compiling the contributions have ensured the high quality of this publication. Their attention to detail and commitment to excellence have been crucial to the realization of this journal. Anurag Anand, the founder, and the team of We Tell A Folktale worked towards the academic compilation of the articles in the journal. Special acknowledgement goes to Ayantika Chakraborty, whose academic excellence and expert review of each article provided us with the best format.

A special thanks to Jojoy Philip from the design team, without whom the journal magazine

would not have been this aesthetically pleasing. We also extend our gratitude to Ashish Dhir, the photographer, and Manas Acharya, who designed the cover.

Lastly, we acknowledge the support of our readers and the broader academic community. Your interest and engagement drive us to continue exploring and documenting the rich cultural landscapes of Asia. We hope this journal serves as a valuable resource for scholars, practitioners, and enthusiasts alike, and contributes to the ongoing preservation and appreciation of mask dances in Asia.

Thank you all for your invaluable contributions and support.

Introduction

The Chilika Shelduck International Folk Art Carnival, a five-day celebration of cultural diversity through themes of myth, migration, and modernity, serves as a vibrant introduction to the rich tradition of mask dances across Asia. Held at the ODI ART Centre, this experiential festival brings together traditional artists from India and beyond, fostering audience engagement and establishing valuable market connections. Visitors are offered immersive experiences through various workshops, including museum visits, heritage education, storytelling sessions, and explorations of local culinary culture. This carnival not only aims to preserve and promote cultural heritage but also seeks to integrate it with contemporary society and enhance the state's cultural economy.

“Everything that is profound loves the mask.”

– Friederich Nietzsche

Masks hold significant cultural importance across various societies, serving as powerful symbols in rituals, performances, and communal identities. Historically, masks have been essential to religious and spiritual ceremonies, acting as intermediaries between the human and divine realms. In numerous cultures, they embody ancestral spirits or deities, facilitating connections with the supernatural during rituals and festivals. The use of masks in theatrical performances, such as *Noh* theatre in Japan or the *Barong* dance in Bali, highlights their role in storytelling and the preservation of folklore. As it had been said by William Bascom, all of these performances serve four functions of folklore. These performances not only entertain but also educate, validate culture, and reinforce communal values to ensure social control. Additionally, masks function as instruments of social cohesion, often utilized in rites of passage, healing ceremonies, and political expressions. Moreover, the mask is a tool that is widely used in the form of magic, both as sacred and profane. The aesthetic and symbolic intricacies of masks reflect the diverse cultural narratives and artistic practices, making them vital components of societal heritage. Their ongoing use and adaptation in contemporary contexts underscore the lasting

significance of masks as cultural artefacts that bridge the past with the present.

The 9th Chilika Shelduck International Folk Art Carnival, held over a five-day period, focused on the theme of Mask Traditions of Asia. This thematic exploration brought together an impressive array of traditional folk dances from various regions across Asia, showcasing the rich cultural diversity and intricate artistry of mask traditions. The program featured performances of the South Korean mask dance, alongside an array of Indian mask traditions, including *Purulia Chhau*, *Seraikela Chhau*, Pashu nacho, and Prahallada Nataka, among others.

The history and evolution of mask dances in Asia is a fascinating journey through time, reflecting the rich cultural heritage and artistic traditions of the region. Mask dances have deep roots in ancient rituals and spiritual practices, serving as a bridge between the human and the divine. The evolution of mask dances in Asia showcases the adaptability and resilience of these art forms, as they continue to attract audiences and preserve cultural heritage in contemporary contexts. The detailed designs, expressive movements, and symbolic meanings of masks highlight the enduring relevance of these traditions, making them a vital part of Asia's cultural landscape.

The mask dance performances mentioned previously were exhibited at the Chilika ODI Art Center during the 2023 carnival, providing a platform for artists to display their heritage and for audiences to engage with the vibrant expressions of these cultural practices. Each performance highlighted the unique characteristics and historical significance of its respective mask tradition, reflecting the deep cultural roots and ongoing relevance of these art forms.

The event facilitated an enriching exchange of artistic techniques and cultural narratives, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the diverse mask traditions across

Asia. Through workshops, live demonstrations, and interactive sessions, the carnival enabled participants to gain insight into the symbolic meanings, traditional craftsmanship, and performance styles associated with these masks. The program not only celebrates the aesthetic and cultural value of mask dances but also contributes to their preservation and promotion in contemporary contexts.

The success of the 9th Chilika Shelduck International Folk Art Carnival, with its focus on Mask Traditions of Asia, not only highlighted the vibrant cultural palate of the region but also sparked a new vision for deeper scholarly engagement. Inspired by the diverse array of performances and the rich interactions between artists, scholars, and audiences, an idea took root: to establish a dedicated Center for Research on Asian Art, Culture, Heritage, History, Literature, and related disciplines.

This proposed center aims to serve as a hub for interdisciplinary research and cultural exchange, drawing on the expertise and enthusiasm generated during the carnival. The center would focus on preserving and promoting the intangible cultural heritage of Asia, much like the festival itself, while providing a structured environment for academic inquiry and collaboration. The establishment of the Center for Research on Asian Art and Culture is a testament to the enduring impact of the Chilika Shelduck International Folk Art Carnival. It represents a commitment to safeguarding and celebrating the cultural wealth of Asia, ensuring that future generations can continue to learn from and be inspired by this rich legacy.

The journal "The Mask Dances of Asia" represents a significant advancement in the study and preservation of mask dance traditions across the continent. Serving as an academic platform, this journal aims to facilitate in-depth research on various aspects of Asian mask traditions, providing scholars with the opportunity to

publish their findings and contribute to the global body of knowledge on Asian cultural heritage.

By leveraging the insights and expertise of researchers, the journal delves into the historical evolution, cultural significance, and contemporary relevance of mask dances. It explores the intricate craftsmanship involved in creating masks, the symbolic meanings they carry, and their role in rituals, performances, and community cohesion. Each research article of the journal showcases detailed analyses of specific mask traditions, such as the *Talchum* mask dance of Korea, the *Kabuki* theatre of Japan, and the *Kecak* dance of Bali, among others.

The journal also highlights the intersections between traditional practices and modern influences, examining how globalization, tourism, and cultural exchange shape the contemporary practice of mask dances. Through comparative studies, it identifies common challenges faced by different traditions and shares successful strategies for preservation and adaptation.

Moreover, “The Mask Dances of Asia” includes contributions from interdisciplinary fields,

integrating perspectives from anthropology, history, art, and performance studies. This multidisciplinary approach enriches the understanding of mask dances, situating them within broader cultural and social contexts.

The publication is an invaluable resource for academics, cultural practitioners, and policymakers, offering insights that can inform cultural preservation efforts and policy decisions. It also serves as a bridge between scholarly research and public engagement, fostering greater appreciation and awareness of the rich heritage of Asian mask dances.

In conclusion, the journal not only advances academic discourse but also plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting the mask dance traditions of Asia. By supporting scholars in their research endeavours and disseminating their findings, “The Mask Dances of Asia” contributes to the sustainable development and cultural continuity of these vibrant cross-generic art forms which include performance, art, and craft together as one art form.

Editors



Barong Mask Dance Indonesia

ANURAG ANAND

Abstract

This study highlights the profound influence of ancient India on local cultures, languages, and practices across Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, facilitated by accessible land and sea routes. It identifies the presence of Indic elements in Indonesian art, architecture, and folklore, shaped by centuries of Hindu-Buddhist rule. Indian epics, such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata, have significantly impacted literary traditions, as seen in various forms of puppetry, dance, and storytelling. Notably, the Indonesian term '*Esa*,' which signifies the oneness of God, is derived from the Sanskrit word '*ish*.' (Jha, 2022) The research explores the significant role of dance and traditional theatre in Indonesian culture, emphasizing their importance in ceremonial contexts and their Indic influences. Rooted in ancient traditions, these art forms demand mastery, sensitivity, and elegance, while also encouraging innovation and diverse interpretations. Masks are essential in festivals and rituals, with artists skilfully crafting complex characters and narratives inspired by Indian deities. Among these performances, the *Barong*—a benevolent

creature from the underworld—and *Rangda*, an evil witch, stand out. The *Barong*'s ultimate victory in these performances, which blend music, dance, drama, and audience interaction, underscores the cultural richness and dynamism of Indonesian arts and Indian influence on it.



This specific *barong ket* was the last one made by the master craftsman, I. Wayan Tangguh of Singapadu, before he died. Photo source: Second Face, Museum of Cultural Masks.

Introduction

The Balinese *Barong* dance, an enchanting carnival with ancient origins, is deeply embedded in Bali's cultural heritage. Appreciating this dance requires an understanding of the complex interplay of mythology, religion, and tradition that shapes its form. Beyond mere performance, the *Barong* dance serves as a dynamic narrative depicting the eternal struggle between good and evil, a central theme in Balinese Hinduism.

The *Barong*, a mythical creature with a flexible body, is adorned with materials representing different animals. This dance enacts a supernatural battle between the benevolent *Barong* and the malevolent witch *Rangda*, characterized by her terrifying demonic form. This performance epitomizes Bali's cultural depth and its fusion of folklore and spirituality.

The term "*barong*" is etymologically derived from old Javanese, specifically "*barwan*" or "*baron*," meaning bear or honey bear (Zoetmulder, 2006, p. 112). According to Gautama (2007, p. 58), in the Dictionary of the Balinese Language, "*barong*" signifies a manifestation of animal mythology symbolizing truth in the fight against destructive forces. Similarly, the word "*rangda*" originates from the old Javanese term "*Randa*," meaning widow or a woman separated from her husband due to divorce or death (Zoetmulder, 2016, p. 918).

In traditional Balinese mythology, *Rangda* is depicted as the demonic queen of *Leyaks*, notorious for her fearsome nature and proclivity for devouring children. She commands an army of malevolent witches in opposition to *Barong*, the leader of the forces of good. This cosmic struggle is vividly portrayed in the *Barong* dance, symbolizing the timeless conflict between good and evil (Sonwane, 2019, p. 63). The dance culminates in a climactic battle between *Barong* and *Rangda*, resulting in *Barong*'s triumph. *Rangda* retreats, symbolizing the defeat of evil and the restoration of celestial order.

Barong and *Rangda* occupy a prominent position in Balinese culture as prime characters of traditional art forms. These dances, known as *Tapel*, are performed during both sacred and secular events. Balinese dance is generally categorized into three types: *wali*, *bebali*, and *balih-balihan*. *Wali* dance is a sacred form typically performed within temple grounds. *Bebali* dance, serving ceremonial purposes, is performed in the temple's central courtyard, embodying both sacred and secular elements. *Balih-balihan* dance is non-religious, primarily entertaining, and usually staged in public spaces or outside the temple. To fully understand the significance of the *Barong* dance, it is crucial to trace its historical origins and lineage to ancient Indian influences and the subsequent cultural synthesis in Indonesia.

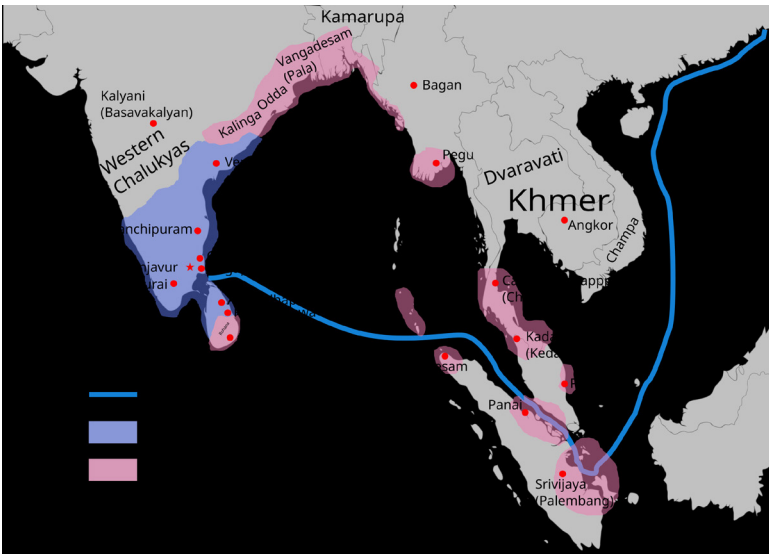


The *Barong Ket* consorts with a playful monkey in the *Barong* Performance.
 Photo source: Second Face, Museum of Cultural Masks.

Tracing the Origin and Evolution

India and Southeast Asian countries share complex and interconnected social values, reflecting a heritage enriched by diverse local wisdom and art forms. Notably, Indian epics such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are widely recognized, adapted, and performed in various localized forms across Southeast Asia. These narratives have been and continue to be tailored to align with the prevailing traditions and norms of contemporary societies. From the 2nd to the 12th century, under Indian dynasties like the Palava, Gupta, Pala, and Chola, many regions in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, were significantly influenced by Indian culture, shaping essential social elements such as culture, law, and governance. The Indonesian social system, in particular, bears a profound Indian

influence, facilitated by direct trade routes through the Malacca and Sunda Straits (Wade, 2009, p. 221-265).



Map showing the extent of the Chola empire during Rajendra Chola I (c. 1030 CE)
 Source: “THE CŌḶAS” by K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, Spencer, G. (1967)

Indigenous animism, dynamism, and beliefs have been integral to the cultural practices of the Austronesian peoples inhabiting the Indonesian archipelago. Hindu influences arrived in the region as early as the first century CE. The discovery of ancient *chandi* (temples) in Java and the western islands of Indonesia, along with inscriptions such as the eighth-century *Canggal* inscription, attests to the widespread adoption of *Shiva* iconography, including the *Lingam*, and deities such as *Parvati*, *Ganesha*, *Vishnu*, *Brahma*, and *Arjuna* during the late first millennium CE. The Indonesian islands assimilated both Hindu and Buddhist concepts, integrating them with the existing indigenous religion and animistic traditions (McDaniel, 2010).

The *Barong* and *Rangda* conception is in Hindu Literature, namely the *Purana* books and also the books that have been adapted in the old Javanese literature. In the *Purana* books, *Barong* and *Rangda* can be associated with the manifestation of *Shiva* and *Durga* in the aspect of *Krodha* (wrathful). This aspect is the highest form of the omnipotence of God that gives grace and protection to the devotees. Moreover, terrible forms are not a threat to worshipers but are a guarantee for the protection of the devotees. (Purwanto, 2019, p. 282)



The 9th-century Hindu Trimurti Prambanan temple is located on the border between Yogyakarta and Central Java province. The three largest temples are dedicated to Shiva in the center, Brahma on the left, and Vishnu on the right. On the front of each temple are the temples of *vahanas* (vehicles of gods). There were originally hundreds of Prevara temples. Photo Courtesy: Gunawan Kartapranata, 2010



Rangda, in Bali, is a form of the feared goddess of death *Durga*. Singapadu, South Bali, Indonesia, Southeast Asia
Photo Source: Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum

In Hindu worship practices, specifically within *Bhakti* and *Karma Marga*, the concept of deity has evolved to include depictions of gods as idol deities (*istadevata*). An *istadevata* is a deity loved and revered according to one's walk of life and believed to offer protection. In Bali, the *Barong* and *Rangda* are worshipped as *Chitradevata* (a god who is sculptured and engraved), embodying the duality of sacred figures in Hindu religion (Titib, 2001, p. 38). Religiously, the *Barong* and *Rangda* are considered highly sacred *Pratima* (Sculpture of the *istadevata*). Culturally, they are not only revered as sacred icons but also celebrated as remarkable artworks within Balinese Hinduism. These representations are typically showcased in temple ceremonies, often integrated with the *Calon Arang* play. The artistic depiction of *Barong* and *Rangda* captivates both local art aficionados and international tourists. Therefore, the mystical essence of *Barong* and *Rangda* warrants an in-depth exploration of their religious and cultural significance (Purwanto, 2019, p. 260).



This elaborate *Barong* is kept in a pavilion in the inner courtyard of Pura Taman Ayun, the royal temple of the Mengwi dynasty.
Photo Courtesy: Michael Gunther, 2014

Plots and Characters of the *Barong* and *Rangda* Tale:

The *Barong*, a revered lion spirit from the Gianyar region, especially Ubud, is a cornerstone of Balinese cultural and touristic heritage. This mythical creature, often seen as a guardian and protector, symbolizes the force of good. In the context of the *Calon Arang* theatrical dance, *Barong*'s role is pivotal as he confronts *Rangda*, the malevolent witch queen of the *Leyaks*, in a dramatic and enchanting narrative that captures the eternal struggle between good and evil.

The performance begins in a tranquil setting where two mischievous monkeys playfully tease the *Barong*. This peaceful atmosphere soon gives way to the high-stakes drama of the “*Keris dance*.” As the dance progresses, the atmosphere



Barong and *Keris* Dance, Bali, Indonesia
Photo Courtesy: Guillaume, 2008

becomes charged with tension and anticipation. The entrance of *Rangda* marks a turning point; her fearsome presence and dark magic disrupt the serenity, casting a malevolent spell over the dancers. Representing the soldiers of *Airlangga*, these dancers, now under *Rangda*'s sinister influence, attempt to end their lives by driving their *Kris* knives into their chests.

However, the supernatural battle between *Barong* and *Rangda* is far from over. Amid this chaos, *Barong*, embodying the protective and benevolent spirit, alongside a priest, extends his powerful protective magic over the soldiers. This divine intervention renders them invulnerable to the blades. The priest, performing sacred rites and sprinkling holy water, enhances this spiritual defence, ensuring the soldiers remain unharmed despite their self-inflicted blows.

The climax of the dance reaches a crescendo as the forces of good, led by *Barong*, triumph over *Rangda*'s evil. *Rangda*, unable to sustain her malevolent influence, is ultimately defeated and forced to retreat. This victory not only symbolizes the restoration of cosmic and spiritual balance but also reaffirms the enduring power of good over evil, a theme that resonates deeply within Balinese Hinduism and its cultural narratives.

By the end of the performance, the audience is left in awe of the intricate choreography, the profound symbolism, and the mesmerizing blend of music, dance, and drama. The *Barong* and *Rangda* dance showcase its unique blend of mythology, spirituality, and artistic excellence. (Sonwane, 2019, p. 28-29)

The Story: *Calon Arang*

Calon Arang is a significant figure in Javanese and Balinese folklore, with origins dating back to the 12th century. Traditionally depicted as a witch and master of black magic, she embodies the complex interplay of myth and cultural narrative in these regions. While the authorship



This scene shows Calon Arang

A performance of *Satua Calonarang* by the AyuBulan Legong Dance Group at the International Conference on Feminism on 24 September 2016. This conference was held by Jurnal Perempuan at the Swiss-Belhotel in Kemang, Jakarta, in commemoration of its twentieth year.

Photo Source: Wikimedia Commons (Author/User: Crisco 1492)

of her tale remains unknown, a manuscript of the *Calon Arang* text, written in the Latin alphabet, is preserved at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, highlighting the enduring impact of her story on Southeast Asian literary heritage.

In the village of Girah, within the *Kediri* Kingdom of what is now Indonesia, resided a malevolent widow named *Calon Arang*, reputed for her mastery of black magic. She had a beautiful daughter, Ratna Manggali, who remained without suitors due to her mother's fearsome reputation. Enraged by this, *Calon Arang* held the villagers accountable and cast a curse upon Girah. She conducted a dark ritual in the cemetery, sacrificing a young girl to the Goddess *Durga*. *Durga* responded by fulfilling *Calon Arang's* curse, resulting in a catastrophic

flood and an incurable plague that claimed many lives.

News of these events eventually reached King *Airlangga* of Kediri, who sent his army to eliminate *Calon Arang*. However, her powers were formidable, and his soldiers were forced to retreat after sustaining heavy casualties. Seeking a resolution, King Airlangga consulted his advisor, *Mpu Bharadah*. Bharadah devised a plan involving his disciple, Mpu Bahula, who proposed marriage to Ratna Manggali. The proposal was accepted, and their marriage celebrations lasted seven days and nights, greatly pleasing *Calon Arang*.

During these festivities, Ratna Manggali disclosed to Bahula the existence of a magic scroll that her mother used for her dark rituals.



The historical map of the Kediri (Kadiri) kingdom 11th to 13th century Eastern Java. Made and improved based on “Atlas Sejarah Indonesia dan Dunia” (The Atlas of Indonesian and World History), PT Pembina Peraga Jakarta 1996.
Photo Source: Wikimedia Commons (Author/User: Gunkarta)

Capitalizing on *Calon Arang*’s deep sleep post-celebration, Bahula successfully retrieved the scroll and delivered it to Mpu Bharadah, who then instructed Bahula to return to Girah.

Mpu Bharadah later visited Girah and confronted *Calon Arang* in the village cemetery, urging her to cease her malevolent practices. *Calon Arang* refused, leading to a fierce battle between her and the Kediri soldiers. Deprived of her magic scroll, *Calon Arang* was ultimately defeated by Mpu Bharadah.

Ratna Manggali mourned her mother’s demise, acknowledging the love and kindness *Calon Arang* had shown her. Nevertheless, she recognized the necessity of her mother’s defeat for the greater good. Following *Calon Arang*’s death, the village of Girah experienced a renewed era of safety, happiness, and security. (Heraty, H. 2012; Muljana, S. 1979)

Symbolism and Functionality of the Barong Mask

The *Barong* mask is more than a visual spectacle; it embodies deep symbolic meanings and serves various functions within Balinese culture. The *Barong* mask is a key part of Balinese culture that



This carved wooden mask, known as *Banaspati Raja* or *Barong Ket*, represents a mythical Balinese creature. Created by a Balinese artist in the early to mid-20th century, it is housed at the Fowler Museum, at UCLA. Made of wood, leather, twine, wire, hair, mirrors, and pigments, it showcases intricate craftsmanship and the rich cultural heritage of Bali.
Photo Source: Fowler Museum, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA

reflects deep community beliefs and traditions, connecting the physical and spiritual worlds. Studying the *Barong* mask shows the complex cultural practices that still influence Balinese society.

The *Barong* masks represent the force of good and the protector of villages, standing as a symbol



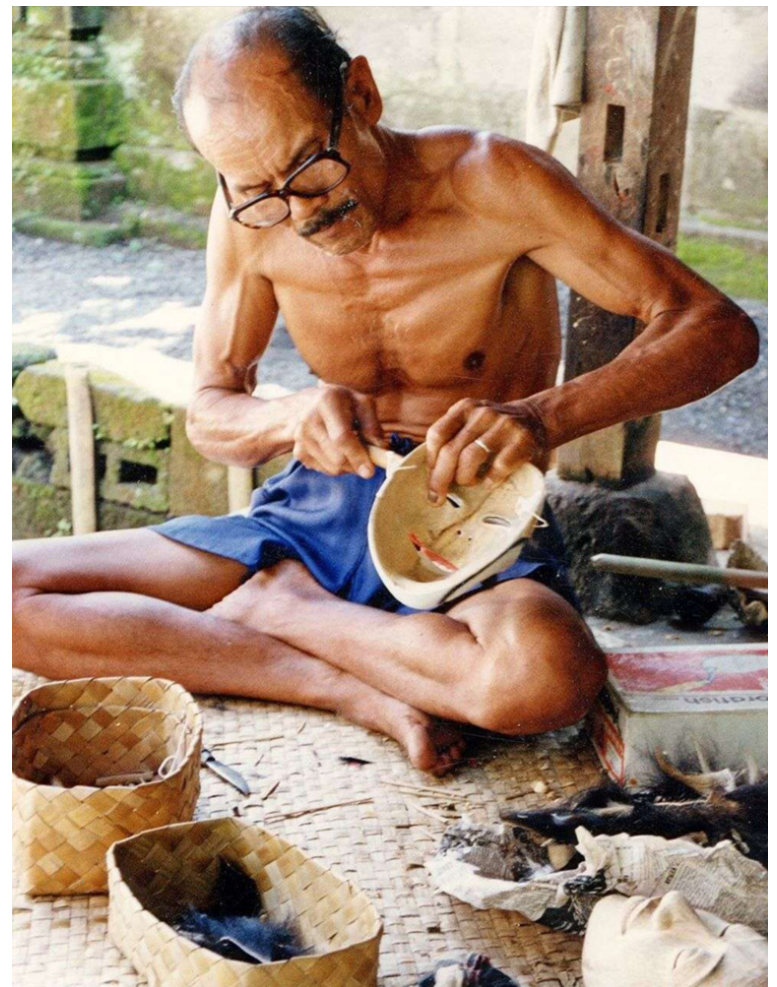
Hand-carved and hand-painted wood *Rangda* mask. *Rangda* may associated with Durga. Also identified with the Hindu warrior goddess *Kali*, transformation and protection.
Photo Source: Asia Barong Art Gallery, Stockbridge Rd, Great Barrington.

of health, fertility, and prosperity. The intricate designs and elaborate decorations of the mask, including materials such as mirrors, pigments, and leather, signify not only aesthetic beauty but also the spiritual strength and protective power that the *Barong* is believed to possess. Each element of the mask, from the bulging eyes to the prominent tusks, is infused with symbolic significance. The eyes, for instance, represent vigilance and the ability to see beyond the physical realm, while the tusks symbolize strength and ferocity in combating evil forces.

The *Barong* mask is also considered a talisman of protection. Villagers believe that the *Barong's* presence wards off malevolent spirits and negative influences. The mask is often paraded through the village during significant ceremonies to cleanse the area of any spiritual impurities.

Additionally, offerings are made to the *Barong* to seek its favor and ensure its continued guardianship over the community. The mask's protective functions are not merely symbolic but are deeply ingrained in the daily lives and spiritual practices of the Balinese people.

Creating a *Barong* mask is a craft form that requires exceptional skill and attention to detail. Artisans spend months meticulously carving and decorating the masks, adhering to traditional techniques passed down through generations. The process involves selecting the right wood, carving intricate patterns, and adding layers of decoration, such as mirrors, paint, and hair, to achieve the final look. The craftsmanship reflects



Ida Wayan Tangguh (Singapadu, 1935-2016) carving a mask in the late 1990s. He was one of the last craftsmen of this mask.
Photo source: Second Face, Museum of Cultural Masks.

the cultural and spiritual significance of the mask, making it a revered object in both artistic and religious contexts. (Annenberg Learner).

Interpretation and analysis of the Folktale and Art Forms

In Balinese tradition, the narrative of *Calon Arang* has predominantly focused on her ferocity and malevolent actions. Historically, *Calon Arang* and her demonic alter ego, *Rangda*, have been associated with the historical figure of Queen Mahendradatta of Bali, a Javanese princess

and the mother of King *Airlangga*. Typically depicted as a fearsome witch with a terrifying visage, *Calon Arang* has long been the symbol of evil in folklore.

However, a contemporary perspective, as articulated by Toeti Heraty in her work, offers a more nuanced and sympathetic portrayal of *Calon Arang*. Heraty suggests that *Calon Arang* should be seen as a victim of demonization within a patriarchal society. This interpretation positions her as a critical voice against misogynistic cultural norms and gender-based



A *Barong Ket* in a shrine within the Teggalah temple compound.
Photo source: Second Face, Museum of Cultural Masks.

discrimination. Heraty's analysis re-evaluates *Calon Arang's* narrative, presenting her as a figure of resistance against the injustices imposed by a male-dominated society. (Heraty, H. 2012)

In his article, "Mysticism of *Barong* and *Rangda* in Hindu Religion," Susilo Edi Purwanto presents a comprehensive framework for understanding the cultural and traditional significance of *Barong* and *Rangda*. The analysis is structured into three primary perspectives:

Firstly, the representation of *Barong* and *Rangda* in Hindu literature is examined. These concepts are rooted in the Purana texts and adapted works in old Javanese literature, where they are associated with the manifestations of *Shiva* and *Durga*, particularly in their *krodha* (wrathful) aspects.

Secondly, the role of *Barong* and *Rangda* within Balinese culture is analyzed. In this context, *Barong* and *Rangda* occupy both sacred and profane realms, with their depictions often embodied in the *Wali* dance, which is performed during religious rituals.

Thirdly, the religious system involving *Barong* and *Rangda* in Hindu rituals is explored. Within the Hindu religious framework, *Barong* and *Rangda* are integral to *Shivaistic* divine teachings, illustrating the dualistic nature of God as *Purusa* (spirit) and *Prakriti* (matter) as a unified whole. Purwanto's analysis utilizes a qualitative methodology to elucidate Hindu literary sources within the context of religious theory, providing a nuanced understanding of the cultural and spiritual dimensions of *Barong* and *Rangda*. (Purwanto, S. E. 2019, p. 258-282).

The Future of the *Barong* and *Rangda* Mask Dance Tradition

Bali is renowned as a prominent tourist destination with a rich cultural heritage encompassing various forms of art. Among these, the performing arts hold significant appeal,

particularly the *Barong Kuntisraya*, commonly known to tourists as the *Barong* and *Keris* dance. Symbolically, *Barong* represents a mythological creature portrayed by two dancers. Originally, *Barong* performances served as ritual ceremonies within Hindu religious practices, often depicting the story of *Calon Arang*. Over time, however, these performances have also been commodified for tourism, with the *Kuntisraya* play frequently presented to visitors. This cultural art form gained further recognition when it was designated as one of the nine traditional Balinese dances and an intangible world cultural heritage at the 10th UNESCO meeting on December 2, 2015, under the theme "Representatives List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity," held in Windhoek, Namibia. (Pradnyadari, G. A. & Ahimsa-Putra, H. S. 2023, p. 850-853)

The *Barong* and *Rangda* mask dance remains a cornerstone of Balinese culture. As globalization and modernization influence traditional practices, it is vital to explore the future trajectory of this cultural heritage. To preserve the traditional techniques, materials, and rituals associated with the *Barong* and *Rangda* mask dance, comprehensive documentation is



Barong Ket "Kuntisraya" (Badung District). Represents a fight between two mythological characters.



necessary. Utilizing archival materials, including historical texts, photographs, and recordings, can provide a detailed record to trace the evolution of the mask dance tradition.

A comparative analysis of the *Barong* mask dance with similar traditions in other cultures can identify common challenges and successful preservation strategies. This analysis will help understand the cultural impact of tourism and globalization on the authenticity and practice of the mask dance tradition. Additionally, it will explore how the tradition can adapt to contemporary contexts while maintaining its core cultural values. Conducting fieldwork in Bali, including interviews with mask carvers, dancers, and community leaders, can gather firsthand information on the current state of the tradition. Surveys and interviews with tourists, local communities, and cultural practitioners can assess their perceptions and experiences with the mask dance tradition.

Future research interventions must also aim to develop recommendations for integrating modern elements into the tradition without compromising its cultural integrity. Furthermore, creating educational materials and programs will promote the understanding and appreciation of the mask dance tradition among diverse audiences. This multi-faceted approach ensures the preservation, adaptation, and continued relevance of the *Barong* and *Rangda* mask dance tradition, securing its place in Balinese culture for future generations.

Conclusion

The *Barong* and *Rangda* mask dance tradition, deeply embedded in Balinese culture and Hindu heritage, symbolizes the enduring battle between good and evil. Evolving over centuries, this tradition reflects ancient Hindu philosophies through its vivid narratives and characters, such

as the benevolent *Barong* and the malevolent *Rangda*. Historically, these performances have been central to Balinese religious ceremonies, mirroring the epic battles depicted in Hindu mythology.

Over time, the tradition has undergone significant transformations. Originally a sacred ritual, the *Barong* and *Rangda* dance has also become a major tourist attraction, blending sacred and secular elements. This evolution presents both challenges and opportunities for preserving the tradition's authenticity.

Future efforts must focus on documenting traditional techniques, exploring innovative adaptations, and educating younger generations and international audiences. By balancing preservation with adaptation, the *Barong* and *Rangda* mask dance will continue to be a vibrant expression of Balinese culture, enriching its heritage for future generations.

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Dancer of nobleman and a percussion player



Suyeong Yaryu Mask Dance Drama of South Korea

SO INHWA

Form

Suyeong Yaryu is one of *Talchum* (mask dance drama) from *Suyeong* district of *Busan* of the Southeastern region, Gyeongsang province, South Korea. *Suyeong* is the name of a place and *yaryu* means “play in the field.” According to Jeong Sang-bark, a folklorist¹, traditionally around the third or fourth day of January according to the lunar calendar, the *yaryu* organizing association, which was a group of people common but talented at playing music, dancing, and acting performed a ritual called “treading on the earth gods.” They visited all the houses to suppress evil spirits for the owners of the houses and received crops and money in return, with which they could hold the *yaryu* performance.

Then, the masks and props were made by a craftsman from the association. The mask maker was supposed to behave himself and make them in a pious place. When the making was done, an offering was arranged to conduct a mask rite in prayer for the success of the mask dance drama.

¹ Jeong Sang-bark



Figure 1: Treading on the Earth Gods

On the eve of the first full moon, performers auditioned in front of the elders of the village who allotted the role or character in the drama for each performer. The next morning, the performers, together with a music band, conducted an offering rite at village shrines and wells, praying for the welfare and prosperity of the village for the new year and a successful performance of *yaryu*. When the full moon was set to rise, performers gathered at the starting point for the street procession, starting with lamp holders followed by a farmers' music band, female entertainers playing the role of eight fairies, a performer playing the role of the head nobleman and other mask dance performers and singers, to entertain spectators along the road to the performance venue.

When the group of performers arrived, people started to perform *deotbaegi-chum*, a dance with freedom within rules. Individuals showed their talent and the group dance continued. At



Figure 2: Mask rite with all the masks



Figure 3: Today's street procession

midnight, children and women went back home, and then the mask dance drama started.

These days, they do not perform the mask dance drama at midnight anymore. The present *Suyeong Yaryu* is composed of four acts: Nobleman, *Yeongno* (a therianthropic character), an Old Man and His Wife, and Lion Dance. Characters include noblemen, *Malttugi* (a servant, and horseman for the noble family), *Yeongno*, an old man, his wife and his concubine, a lion, and a tiger. The acts are not directly connected. An ensemble of six to ten musicians plays musical instruments such as a small flat gong called *kkwaenggwari*, a large gong called *jing*, a barrel drum called *buk*, a double reed wind instrument called *taepyeongso*, and an hourglass-shaped drum called *janggu*. The website of the Suyeong Folklore Conservation Association (<http://www.suyeongminsok.or.kr>)² introduces the four acts as follows:

Act 1: Nobleman. A servant called *Malttugi* discloses the inner stories of the upper classes and jeers the incompetence and bluff of the nobility. This episode mainly consists of a conversation between the head nobleman and *Malttugi* and their dancing. *Malttugi* and five noblemen including the head nobleman appear in this episode.

² Suyeong Folklore Conservation Association



Figure 4: The old man and his wife

Act 2: *Yeongno*. When the head nobleman is walking around in grief, *Yeongno*, an imaginary monster of half-man and half-animal, in a black wrapping cloth appears with a loud sound. This monster captures and swallows the head nobleman.

Act 3: Old Man and His Wife. It is about a love triangle between a wife and a young concubine fighting over an old man. In the end, the old man comes home back, his concubine leaves home, and his wife is beaten to death by him.

Act 4: Lion Dance. It is a lion's dance with a tiger without words. The two fight against each other and the lion catches the tiger in the end. This episode originated from the topographical characteristics of Mt. Baek at Suyeong. It is considered that this episode shows the ritual dancing to expel evil spirits and bring good luck.



Figure 5: Malttugi leading the lion



Figure 6: Lion and Tiger

In the past, the performance ended at the dawn. Then people burnt the masks away because they believed that the spirit got to dwell in the masks through the mask rite which had been held days ago. People expressed gratitude for the successful performance and prayed for the welfare of the village. These days, the masks are not burnt but kept for the next performance. Mask dance performances can happen any time in any empty space. Throughout the performance on the open stage, the audience plays a great role, contributing to the production with their cheers like any other Korean folk music and dance.

History

Mask dance has existed since ancient times in Korea. According to Son Tae-do³, a folklorist, when there was a cause to celebrate, court officials managed a variety of performances including mask dance on a mountain-like

makeshift elevated stage. It was actively practiced during the *Goryeo* era (918–1392) in large-scale national-level events. However, in 1634 of the *Joseon* (1392–1910), the performance on a makeshift elevated stage was excluded from the official events. Then the performers spread out to different regions across the country to seek for chances to perform. It is assumed that many of the contemporary village mask dance dramas



Figure 7: Suyeong Yaryu on Current Open Stage

³ Son Tae-do

began to have been formed among villagers influenced by professional artists.

Suyeong Yaryu started in the late Joseon era as a village ritual in *Suyeong* district where the Headquarter of the *Gyeongsangjwa-do* (*Gyeongsang* “left” province) Naval Force Commander existed.⁴ The Naval Force there was supposed to guard the southern coast. “Suyeong” means the Naval Force in Korean. Suyeong area has a plain, and a river and sea water meet there. Therefore, the village flourished both in agriculture and fisheries, and people afforded to enjoy music and dance performances there. Consequently, a group of common villagers to perform *Suyeong Yaryu* was formed and transmitted the art from generation to generation.

Under the Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945), the authority prohibited Korean people to hold rallies. So, they could not gather together to play the mask dance drama. The Japanese authorities were worried if Korean people got together, they might be united as one and rebel against their rule. After Korean independence, the government tried to strengthen Korean identity and it established the Intangible Cultural Heritage Preservation System in 1962. The performers who practiced the mask dance drama before the Japanese prohibition of rallies restored it in cooperation with the seniors and scholars of folklore.

Growth

As a UNESCO report in 2022⁵ points out, “the practice (of mask dance drama) uses caricatures of everyday characters to convey its underlying appeal to universal equality and criticism of social hierarchy.” This social criticism based on the mask dance drama attracted young people. As a result, the mask dance drama circles were formed

in almost every university in the 1970s and 1980s, when the antigovernment student movement was active and harsh under the military regime. Students learned how to perform the mask dance drama and they grew up as artists in the circles. As the UNESCO report pointed out well, “this generation continues to play a critical role in the transmission of the practice, passing on the related knowledge and skills of *talchum* (mask dance drama) performance and mask-making to younger generations through local associations, clubs, camps, and public schools.”

Masters

Although there are surely some people from other families, people from the Tae family are regarded to have played the most remarkable roles throughout the history of *Suyeong Yaryu*. It is said that the Tae family originally lived in Suyeong. Tae Han-young is a current candidate for the intangible cultural heritage protector in the *kkwaenggwari* in *Suyeong yaryu*. He is the artist of the fourth generation of the Tae family. As written in the Busan History and Culture Grand Dictionary⁶, his great grandfather, Tae Du-mun(1852~1930) was good in the *Janggu*. Tae Du-mun’s three sons grew up to be *Suyeong Yaryu* artists. In 1946 when the Japanese colonial period was over and they could freely practice the mask dance drama, his sons began to work on *Suyeong Yaryu*. Especially, Tae Myeong-jun(1904-1979), his third son, held the restorative performance. In 1963, he completed the restoration. He taught *Suyeong Yaryu* at schools and the university in the Busan area. He became the first intangible cultural heritage holder in it, playing the role of the head nobleman in 1971. Tae Myeong-jun’s son, Tae Deok-su(1929-2014), took over his father’s position in 1989. Tae Han-young is Tak Deok-su’s son. He used to be a school English teacher but now dedicates himself to *Suyeong Yaryu*.

⁴ Busan Metropolitan City

⁵ UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2022.

⁶ “Busanyeoksamunhwadaejeon”



Figures 7 and 8: Tae Han-young(Left) and Kim Sung-yul(Right) are the two prominent personalities of the dance form and organization related to it.

Societal Stories

Suyeong Yaryu deals with social issues through combinations of dialogue, movements, dances, and songs. For example, as the 2024 Andong Mask Dance Festival introduces *Suyeong Yaryu* on its website (www.maskdance.com)⁷, a servant criticizing the decadent nobleman “with humorous sarcasm and bitter tongue” in the first act “cries out for class leveling and human rights.” Also, the love triangle in the third act shames patriarchal husbands and male-dominated society, through the conflict between a husband and wife. All of these stories manifest the social realities and absurdities of the late Joseon period.⁸ However, they always end with a reconciliatory dance encompassing all parties⁹ while promoting virtue and punishing vice. It makes the mask dance drama an art about harmony, not one about conflict creating a sense of joy.

⁷ 2024 Andong Mask Dance Festival

⁸ Kweon Hye-kyung

⁹ Cultural Heritage Administration

Types and Variations

As of the first of Sep, 2022 in Korea, a total of thirteen forms of mask dance drama were inscribed as national intangible cultural heritages and five forms as regional intangible cultural heritages.¹⁰ The mask dance dramas are called by different names according to the regions.¹¹ The western part of South Gyeongsang province calls it *ogwangdae* (lit., five clowns). The eastern half refers to it as *yaryu* (lit., play in an open field) just as *Suyeong Yaryu*. The region around Andong, North Gyeongsang Province, calls it *byeolsingut talnori*, which suggests that mask dance drama performances were conducted as part of shamanic rituals. In the regions of the eastern seaboard, there is *Gwanho Noreum* performed by the local government slaves in Gangneung on the festival of *dano* (the fifth day of the fifth month of the year according to the lunar calendar), and *Bukcheong Sajanoreum* (lit., lion play from Bukcheong) in the Hamgyeong province. The

¹⁰ Roh Hyung-suk, 2022.

¹¹ Cultural Heritage Administration

Seoul and Gyeonggi Province call it *sandae nori*, (lit., play on a makeshift elevated stage) which was performed at the welcoming reception for Chinese envoys or whenever royal events were held”.¹² The northwestern province of Hwanghae in North Korea calls *Bongsan Talchum* (Mask Dance of Bongsan,), *Gangnyeong Talchum* (Mask Dance of Gangnyeong), and *Eunmyul Talchum* (Mask Dance of Eunmyul).

Each regional version of the mask dance drama has unique dance movements and expressive styles different from each other in detail.¹³ According to Lee Byoung-ok, a dance professor¹⁴, the mask dance dramas from Gyeongsang province feature freestyle dance movements and “a dance movement stepping on the ground with one foot along with the knees bent after jumping high into the air”. The ones from Gyeonggido are characterized by “frequent use of hand gestures” and delicate dance movement in a relatively fixed formal structure. Those from the northwestern province of Hwanghae feature a powerful step, leaping in the air while swirling around a long white sleeve. The stories of traditional mask dance drama are also varied reflecting today’s situation for contemporary audiences in melodies and rhythms different from traditional ones. Also, based on the traditional mask dance dramas, new ones are created.

Patrons

During the late Joseon dynasty when commerce, industry and agricultural productivity increased,¹⁵ the mask dance dramas including *Suyeong Yaryu* were popularized among villagers as a popular art boomed in new cultural trend. People in the middle class who earned much money tended to have an interest in arts and often became art supporters at that time. In the

case of *Suyeong Yaryu*, people of the whole village who were affordable voluntarily donated grains and money to the *yaryu* organizing association. Now, in modern society, public organizations including the government play the role of one of the most influential patrons, though there are voluntary associations whose members help themselves with a little bit of official support.

Present State

When *Suyeong Yaryu* was designated as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 1971, the Suyeong Yaryu Safeguarding Association (Association for the Preservation of Suyeong Yaryu) was established. Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea¹⁶ introduces the organization as follows.

“It is a voluntary grassroots organization with its operations executed through the collaborative efforts of the membership. They include officially recognized masters who provide a focal point for the transmission of the element based on accumulated experience and performance skills, including the crafting of the required masks. The members also conduct various transmission activities depending on their specialties and years of experience.”

In 2015, the individual mask dance drama safeguarding associations including *Suyeong Yaryu* gathered to form the General Federation of Korean Mask Dance Associations. And since 2022 when *Suyeong Yaryu* was finally inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity together with other Korean mask dance dramas under the category of the *Talchum* or Korean mask dance drama, the performance of *Suyeong Yaryu* got more active through a cooperative network among the affiliates of General Federation of Korean Mask Dance Associations.

As the UNESCO report in 2022¹⁷ says,

¹² Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Dec 02, 2014.

¹³ Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Sep 16, 2014.

¹⁴ Lee Byoung-ok, 2014.

¹⁵ “The Pansori Epic Chant”, 2014.

¹⁶ Cultural Heritage Administration

¹⁷ UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2022

“In addition to serving as a tool for social commentary, mask dance drama can promote and reinforce local cultural identities through the inclusion of local dialects and folksongs.” Mask dance dramas often play an important part in local festivals. Initially performed by men, the mask dance drama associations have more female members these days. Also, Korean young people, on average, like Western-style popular music, dance, or drama. Naturally, the members of the association get older and older. However, as being on Korea’s 22nd intangible cultural heritage on the UNESCO list, *Suyeong Yaryu* seems to lead Suyeong village people to take pride in their art more than before. People wait and see if the young generation’s interest will change or be diversified.

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- Here is the link to *Suyeong Yaryu* performance in the year 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ho1-JBoyf0w&t=208s>



The Art of Masks Connecting Gods and Humans

Hahoe Byeolsingut Mask Dance

SON SANG-RAK

Translated & Edited by PARK YEON-OCK

I. Introduction

A. *About Hahoe Village*

Hahoe is a historically significant traditional village in Andong, South Korea, renowned for its historical value and cultural richness. One of the village's representative cultural heritages is the *Hahoe Byeolsingut* mask dance, a sacred ritual performed to pray for the village's well-being and prosperity, aiming to foster communication between gods and humans.

B. The Illness and Healing of Gods Korean ancestors believed that gods, like humans, could fall ill. This belief arose when disasters struck the village.



Figure 1: Korean map of Andong's Hahoe Village, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, providing a guide to explore the village's significant cultural landmarks.

For instance, when epidemics spread causing widespread suffering, when a poor harvest occurred instead of a bountiful one, or when natural disasters like major floods or fires happened, villagers attributed these events to the gods' weakening powers or anger. To heal

the gods' illness and protect the village, they performed the *Byeolsingut* ritual. The *Byeolsingut*, conducted to cure the gods' illness, is a form of magical ritual inviting the gods to descend into the human world, providing protection and blessings to the village. Through this ceremony, they aimed to restore the gods' powers and appease their anger to prevent disasters from befalling the village.



Figure 2: Performers of the Hahoe Mask Dance gather with villagers at the shrine to conduct a sacred ritual inviting the presence of the gods.

II. Three Main Stages of *Byeolsingut*

The *Hahoe Byeolsingut* consists of three main stages: *Gangsin* (invoking the Gods), *Ohsin* (entertaining the Gods), and *Songsin* (sending off the Gods). Each stage is a sacred ritual that plays a crucial role in connecting villagers with the gods.

A. *Gangsin* (invoking the Gods)

Gangsin involves summoning the guardian god *Seonangsin* from the *Seonangdang* shrine to the village. The ritual includes setting up *Seonangdae*

and *Naerimdae*, with a performer wearing a *Gaksi* mask descending into the village. During the *Gangsin* process, the village, upon receiving the god, transitions from its ordinary social order to a world of extraordinary chaos.

B. *Ohsin* (intertaining the Gods)

During the *Ohsin* stage, a festive atmosphere is created where gods and humans become one. Through mask dances and various performances, they aim to please the gods, alleviate their anger, and pray for the village's peace and prosperity. In this stage, villagers spend time with the gods, expressing their wishes in hopes of receiving divine blessings.

C. *Songsin* (Sending off the Gods)

The final stage of *Byeolsingut*, *Songsin*, involves sending the gods back to their original place. The ceremony concludes with offerings at *Seonangdae* and hanging *Dangbangwol* (sacred bells) on the shrine, wishing for the continuation of the gods' blessings even after their departure.

III. Performance Scripts

Yeonhui (Performance) Script of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage No. 69

The *Hahoe Byeolsingut* mask dance script had been passed down through generations but was discontinued in 1928. It was later restored in 1978 for a folk performance contest, and based on this, it was further supplemented and designated as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage of Korea in 1980. Since then, it has been further refined through the guidance, oral testimonies, and verification of various holders, including the late Lee Chang-hee (passed away in 1995). It is currently used as a teaching material for education. This article introduces key parts of the performance script.

Hahoe Byeolsingut Talnori Yeonhui (performance) Script

Designation Number: National Intangible Cultural Heritage No. 69

Designation Date: November 17, 1980

Designation Report: Lee Doo-hyun (Professor at Seoul National University, Cultural Heritage Committee Member), Shim Woo-sung (Cultural Heritage Expert)

Investigation Report: Seong Byeong-hee (Professor at Andong University, Gyeongsangbuk-do Cultural Heritage Committee Member)

1. *Gangsin* (Descent of the Spirits)

Participating Roles: All participants in the *Byeolsingut*

Instruments: *Gilgunak* (*Gilmaegu*), *Gutgeori*, *Ja Jinmori* Performance

Location: *Seonangdang* at the mid-mountain area of *Hwaksan*

On the last day of the lunar month, a carpenter selects pine wood and makes a new *naerimdae* (about 4 *cheok*), which the *sanju* carries. The *seonangdae* (about 15-16 *cheok*) is usually carried on the shoulders of two clowns, followed by all the clowns as they ascend to *Seonangdang*.

When the *sanju* and the clowns arrive at *Seonangdang*, the main clown sets up the *seonangdae* on the left side of *Seonangdang*, leaning it against the “*chima*.” The *sanju*, holding the *naerimdae* with both hands, enters the shrine and places it against the altar. The *yusa* prepares and arranges the offerings on the altar. The offerings are used as they are without processing, with the types and arrangements as follows. List of items needed for the ritual

- Pig's head (1): Placed on a ritual dish
- *Myeongtae* (1 row): 20 dried pollack arranged on willow branches, folded in 3-4 rows and placed on a dish
- Fish and seafood: One octopus and one *bango* (amberjack) placed on the *dojakdae* (fish platter)
- Fruit: One plate of jujubes, a bowl of

chestnuts, dried persimmons placed on a dish

- Rice cake: One plate of white rice cakes placed on a tray
- Oil lamp: One lamp filled with sesame oil and a wick is lit
- Alcohol bottle and cup

Procedures of the *Kangsin* ritual Once all preparations are complete, the Sanju enters *Seonangdang*, inspects the offerings, and bows. The *yusa*, with controlled movements, lights the oil lamp. At this time, the clowns stand in line outside *Seonangdang*, holding their breath. Once the oil lamp is lit, the *sanju* stands, performs two bows, and kneels before the altar. (参神)The *yusa* presents the wine cup to the altar, then hands it to the *sanju*. The *sanju* receives the cup. The *yusa* pours wine into the cup, and then the *sanju* returns it to the *yusa*, who places it on the altar. After offering the first cup (初酌), the *sanju* stands again, bows twice, then steps back slightly and kneels. (少退跪)The clowns outside *Seonangdang* kneel following the *sanju*.

Following this, the *yusa* takes the *naerimdae*, which is placed against the altar, and hands it to the *sanju*. The *sanju* holds the *naerimdae* with both hands, closing their eyes and solemnly praying for the descent of the spirit. At this time, the *sanju*, holding the *naerimdae* with both hands, closes their eyes and recites a prayer for the descent of the spirit, which includes a request for the village's safety and a bountiful harvest. The format of the prayer is as follows.

Kangsin prayer is not written and read by the *sanju* but is a spontaneous prayer. In the prayer following text is uttered.

Holy guardian deity of *Haedong Joseon*, revered ancestor of our region, overlooking Andong City, Pungcheon-myeon, Hahoe-ri, and born in the year of the Dragon. Whether sitting on a thousand-mile tower or standing in a ten-thousand-mile pavilion, observing the clear mirror... How can you not know.....(omitted).

On the last day of the lunar month, to pray for the peace and prosperity of the village, we shall conduct the *Naerim* ritual followed by the *Byeolsingut*. We request that the guardian deity accept the offerings prepared with sincerity by the villagers, and as the procession moves, *Yusa* with the offerings and an elder without any uncleanness follow at the end of the line as they descend the mountain. Grasp our shoulders and sleeves, descend softly, Descend, descend, descend upon the *seonangdae*~”

As the *sanju* prays solemnly, the *naerimdae* begins to sway slightly, and the bells ring. When the bells ring, it indicates that the spirit has descended, bringing joy to the *sanju* and all the clowns. Once the spirit descends, the *sanju* stands again and bows twice.

At this time, the clowns who were prostrating outside *Seonangdang* also rise and, following the *sanju*'s signal, bow twice and line up. At the front of the line stands *Gaksi*, dancing gracefully with a long silk scarf draped over her shoulders, waving her hands up and down. The person carrying *Gaksi* on their shoulders does not show signs of strain and maintains a bright face.

After descending the mountain, the group proceeds to *Guksindang*. At *Guksindang*, there are no special rituals; instead, they announce the opening of the *Byeolsingut* by carrying *Gaksi* on their shoulders and dancing, circling a vine several times. Upon reaching the village entrance, villagers come out to meet the performers and offer cloth items they brought, hanging them on the *Seonangdae*. The performers then head to *Samsindang* while performing “*Gilnori*”, a street parade. Upon arrival, they set up the *Seonangdae* and *Naerimdae* beside it, leaning against the “*chima*” of the shrine. The *Sanju* hangs the offered clothes on the *Seonangdae*, and then they play the *pungmul*, traditional Korean percussion music and dance joyfully. The *Mudang* does not participate in the *Gangsin* ritual. The *Seonangdae* is leaned against the

inner side of the *Dongsa*, the eastern Shrine) after the day's events, and after the fifteen-day ritual, it is placed horizontally behind the *Seonangdang* along with the *Naerimdae*.

Byeolsingut has been replaced with rituals at the newly built *Samsindang*. The sacred tree of *Samsindang* is a 650-year-old zelkova tree, symbolizing the mother-in-law of the *Seonangshin*. Since the *Gaksi* character is revered as the manifestation of the *Seonangshin*, the actor playing *Gaksi*, even if a *Mudang*, must bow and show respect when the mother-in-law *Samshin* appears before joining the performance.

As the *Sanju* bows, the performers lined up also bow together. After the bowing, *Cheongwangdae* distributes the masks from the *Seonangdae* as in the *Gangsin* ritual. At the shout of “*Sungnyeongsu*” by the *Daegwangdae* (leader), the performers respond with “Yes~” and put on their masks, signalling the start of the



Figure 3: The scene where a performer receives the *Gaksi* mask, symbolizing the goddess, granting permission for the Hahoe Byeolsingut Mask Dance to begin.

main *Talnori*. *Gangsin* signifies the descent of the spirits, manifesting mysteriously through humans from the spiritual world. This ritual negates the hierarchical structures of the real world—such as gender, age, wealth, and status—through prayer and play, aiming to create an egalitarian ideal society where all villagers are united. During the period of the *Byeolsingut*, the village aims to be a world where gods and humans coexist, free from social and gender discrimination, a great world, locally called as (*Daedongje* where everyone has the right to pursue happiness. >

2. *Mudong Madang* (*Mudong Stage*)

- Roles: *Gaksi*, *Mudong* bearer
- Beat: *Jajinmori*
- Dance Movements: *Ogumchum*, *Sonchum*, gentle *Gaksi* steps
- Dialogues: None

After the *Talnori* performance, the *Mudong Madang* follows. The *Pungmul* troupe plays instruments like *Taepyeongso*, *kkwaenggwari*, *buk*, *jing*, and *janggu*. The *Gaksi* character, wearing a mask, prepares for the *Mudong* performance. Just like in the street parade, *Gaksi* sits on the *Mudong* bearer's shoulders, waving the silk scarf and dancing. The performer holding the *kkwaenggwari* and stick circles the audience. Those who do not participate in the “*garilip*” (offering) are encouraged by the sound of the *kkwaenggwari*. When someone responds to the “*garilip*,” they bend slightly and offer money, which is collected in the *Mudong* bearer's bag and used for the *Byeolsingut* event. >

The “*garilip*” by *Gaksi* is performed continuously until the end of the performance.

Gaksi's gaze always looks forward carefully not to lower her head. The white silk scarf is tucked into the sleeves of the *jeogori* to prevent it from slipping out.

They have to be mindful that the skirt does not



Figure 4: A scene where *Mudong* performers carry the goddess Gaksi on their shoulders, parading around the village along with musicians, dancers, and villagers.

obstruct the *Mudong* bearer's view. The dance is performed while waving the hands up and down to the rhythm of the *pungmul* (*Sonchum*). The *pungmul* troupe, led by the *Sangsoe*, circles the courtyard twice, and then the *Mudeong*, carrying *Gaksi*, exits while following the troupe.

If the *Hahoe Byeolsingut* is divided to process into sections, *Gangsin* – *Oshinan* – *Songsin*, the *Mudong Madang* could be classified as the *Oshinan* stage. However, some scholars further divide the *Gangsin* stage into the process of receiving the spirits at *Seonangdang* as *Gangsin* and the process of bringing the spirits to the village as *Yeongsin*. In this classification, the *Mudong Madang* represents the *Yeongsin* act, dramatically welcoming the spirits to the village.

3. *Jujimadang* (*Juji Stage*)

- Roles: *Juji pair* (male, female), *Chorengi*
- Beat: *Nanta*, *Jajinmori*
- Dance Movements: *Juji* dance, *Chorengi* dance, playful *Chorengi* walk
- Dialogues: None

As the *Pungmul* troupe plays the *Nanta* rhythm, a pair of *Juji* characters appear, dressed in hemp sacks covering their heads and bodies, creating a humorous figure. As they sway, the rhythm changes from *Nanta* to *Jajinmori*, and the male and female *Juji* dance to the beat.

The sacks have holes at the ends for their hands, which they use to hold *Juji* masks adorned with feathers. The *Jujis* sometimes pretend to fight or engage in mock sexual behaviour, with the male *Juji* often trying to dominate the female. This dance is intended to drive away evil spirits and purify the ritual space. The *Juji* couple's struggle symbolizes the desire for prosperity and fertility, with the belief that if the female *Juji* wins, the village will have a bountiful harvest.

Chorengi then enters, humorously mocking the *Juji* couple's actions and teasing them, before the scene transitions to the *Baekjeongmadang*.

4. *Baekjeongmadang* (*Butcher Stage*)

- Roles: Butcher, Cow
- Beat: *Hunryeonmachi* (*Jajin Gutgeori*), *Gutgeori*, *Jajinmori*
- Dance Movements: *Mongdurichum*, *Deotbaegichum*, playful butcher walk
- Dialogues: Present

The butcher enters, holding a shield and an axe, swinging it over his shoulder as he dances to the *Hunryeonmachi* beat. After circling the stage once, he sets down his sack and axe, faces the audience, and shouts loudly.

Butcher: (raising the axe to signal the *pungmul*



Figure 5: In the Juji Madang, performers dressed in burlap sacks and wearing Juji masks mimic animals, intensifying the excitement of the mask dance with spirited dance and antics.

rhythm to stop) “Ha ha ha ha ha~ Atta! What a nice day! On such a fine day, I might as well dance and have a good time.” (He sets down the axe and his sword.)

Pungmul troupe: As the butcher’s lines end, the troupe plays *Gutgeori* rhythm.

Butcher: (dancing wildly, raising his arms and legs high in a threatening yet joyful manner, shouting) “Eolssu~ That’s good.”

(A cow saunters in, grazing occasionally, shaking its head, and sometimes playfully headbutting the audience. The butcher notices the cow.)

Butcher: “Oh! There it is, that cow!” (Approaching the cow) “Whoa, whoa~~” (The butcher, noticing the cow’s testicles, feigns shock.)

Butcher: “Whoa~ Look at those big balls! If I could eat those, they’d be great for enhancing virility.” (Laughing wickedly) “Ha ha ha ha ha~”

Cow: (Angry at the butcher’s words, the cow headbutts the butcher.)

Butcher: (Stumbling from the cow’s attack, the butcher gets up, fuming.) “You little... Whoa whoa~~”

Cow: (Charges at the butcher again.) “Look! It’s bigger than human ones, good for curing those without shame or gall. Who wants to buy it?”

Butcher: “What’s the point of looking around? Just buy it already.”

Butcher: “Yeah, even Confucius had children. If you want kids, you need virility. And Without these cow balls, you can’t do it. Who wants to buy it?”

Butcher: “Come on, don’t worry about what others think. Just buy it.” “Hey, Confucius also had kids, right? To have children, you need virility. And if you lose it, you can’t have kids.”



Figure 6: The butcher character, wielding an axe, prepares to capture a cow’s testicles and heart, symbolizing empowerment of lower social classes and critiquing the hierarchy.



Figure 7: The butcher humorously exaggerates the benefits of cow testicles for sale, mocking universal human desires regardless of social class.

“Hey, you can’t be ashamed of selling this.”

Butcher: (feeling dejected) “Ha ha... That’s it for the business.” But I might as well dance and enjoy myself.”

Beat: Jajinmori.

As the rhythm plays, the butcher dances energetically, wielding his axe and sword, displaying fierce and lively movements. But then, suddenly, a thunderous sound interrupts the performance. The butcher, startled, looks around, grabs his sack, and exits hurriedly.

The butcher’s act of trying to sell the cow’s organs and failing symbolizes the absurdity and resistance against social status differences. The crowd engages with the mock sale, seeing it as a way to exchange blessings.

5. *Halmi Madang (Old Woman Stage)*

- Roles: *Halmi* (Old Woman)
- Beat: *Hunryeonmachi* (*Jajin Gutgeori*), *Jajinmori*
- Dance Movements: Hip dance, *Deotbaegichum*, Halmi walk with hip dance
- Dialogues: Present

A loom is placed in the middle of the stage, and Halmi enters, dancing to the *Hunryeonmachi* beat, shaking her hips. She circles the stage once,

approaches the loom, and it’s down, sighing as if tired. (To prevent the scene from dragging, Halmi uses the space wisely to adjust the time.) She pretends to weave, singing the “Weaving Song,” lamenting her hard life. >

Today’s *Talnori* includes an actual loom to make the scene more realistic. The loom is set up with heddles, and real weaving is mimicked. The “Weaving Song” expresses Halmi’s lifetime of hardship and poverty.

Weaving Song

Spring, Spring, Short Jade Spring!
 Oh, spirit of the Seonghwangdang,
 Is spring ending so quickiy ?
 Married for just three days,
 How could such a thing happen anywhere?
 At the young age of fifteen,
 If I had known I’d become a widow,
 Would I have gone to get married?
 The sound of the loom beating,
 A lifetime of married life,
 How frustrating, my fate!
 Two legs of the loom,
 Two legs of my husband,
 And my two legs,
 Joined together, four legs.
 The sound of the loom beating,
 Is the voice of my dear husband.
 How is the household?
 Oh dear, oh dear, don’t ask.
 The skirt I wore on my wedding day,
 The pink skirt became tears,
 The red skirt turned into a dishcloth.
 The only daughter of three generations,
 Just three days after marriage,
 Became a servant in the nobleman’s house.
 Even if I weave scraps and put them together,
 Three meals a day are just coarse grains.
 Long, endless hot summer days,
 Carrying the burden on my back, hungry stomach,
 This servant life in the scholar’s house,
 With strong legs, sweeping briskly,

Eating alone in solitude.
The sound of the loom beating,
This harsh life just goes on and on (sigh).

After singing the “Weaving Song,” Halmi, out of breath, sighs deeply. Sangsoi approaches Halmi and speaks to her.

Sangsoi: “Halmi, is the weaving done?”

Halmi: “The weaving is done, but...” (She responds in a tired voice, catching her breath.)

Sangsoi: “Halmi, did you finish all the cheongoe(herring) I bought yesterday?” (He questions Halmi as if urging her.)

Halmi: “Yesterday, you had one, I had nine. This morning, I had nine, you had one, a full dozen.”

Sangsoi: “Halmi, if you keep eating like that, all

your teeth will fall out... That kind of lifestyle will ruin us.”

Halmi: “(Sigh) That’s just my fate.”

Halmi rises, swinging her hips, steps away from the loom, and the *pungmul* troupe plays *Jajinmori* rhythm. Halmi dances to the beat, shaking her body, then takes a wooden bowl tied to her waist and extends it to the audience, asking for money (“*garlip*”). The audience responds, placing money in the bowl.

When the audience responds to Halmi’s “*garlip*” she expresses gratitude, waving her hands up and down and dancing a little as a token of appreciation. However, if the audience does not respond, Halmi sometimes curses them under her breath.



Figure 8: The old woman character Halmi laments her difficult life through song, representing the struggles of marginalized women in society.

After collecting the offerings and dancing around the stage, Halmi hides the money in her waist and dances energetically.

After Halmi's energetic dance, she exits, and the *pungmul* troupe stops the rhythm.

While Halmi dances to the *pungmul*, she approaches the audience to collect “*garlip*.” When Gaksi enters, holding a *kkwaenggwari* in her left hand and a stick in her right, she performs “*garlip*” as well. As *Gaksi* is considered the manifestation of the *Seonangshin*, the audience willingly responds to her “*garlip*.” >

6. *Pagyesung Madang (Defrocked Monk Stage)*

- Roles: Bune, Monk, *Chorengi*, *Imae*
- Beat: *Gutgeori*, *Jajinmori*
- Dance Movements: *Ogumchum*, *Mongduri* dance, *Deotbaegichum*, graceful *Bune* walk, sly Monk walk, staggering *imae* walk
- Dialogues: Present

To the *Gutgeori* rhythm, *Bune* enters, lifting the hem of her skirt and walking gracefully, swaying her hips, displaying a seductive dance. As she dances alone, *Bune* suddenly feels a need to urinate. She looks around to find a secluded spot, then squats down, lifting her skirt slightly,



Figure 9: A humorous depiction of a monk overcome with lust, abandoning his duties upon encountering a beautiful woman, satirizing religious hypocrisy.

and pretends to relieve herself. She checks her surroundings cautiously.

At this moment, a monk carrying a pilgrim's bag passes by and accidentally sees *Bune*. Though the monk notices that a woman is urinating, he pretends not to see, walking past while stealing glances. However, unable to control his desire, he mutters prayers, trying to suppress his lust.

Monk: “*Namu Amitabul, Gwanseum Bosal, Namu Amitabul, Gwanseum Bosal*” However, having seen the woman in such a compromising position, the monk is overcome with lust. He tries to resist but eventually approaches *Bune*, pretending to be unaware of the situation.

Monk: (approaching *Bune*) “Ahem!”

Bune: (startled by the monk's cough, she stands up abruptly, looking flustered and embarrassed.)

Monk: (as *Bune* runs away, the monk carefully approaches the spot where *Bune* was and sniffs the ground where she urinated.)

Monk: “Ha ha ha ha... Such a smell!” (The monk continues sniffing and giggling, clearly indulging in his base desires, abandoning his duties of a monk.)

Bune: (after noticing the monk's presence, *Bune* runs away but returns, playfully dancing and seducing the monk, who is now completely infatuated.)

Monk: (struggling with his inner conflict, he gives in to his desire) “Ah, damn it! Let's just dance and enjoy ourselves.” (He moves toward *Bune*, trying to embrace her, but *Bune* playfully dodges him.)

Bune: (teasing the monk, playfully runs away but stays within view, continuing to seduce him.)

Monk: (finally giving in to his desire, tries to embrace *Bune* but is thwarted as she runs away laughing.)

Bune: “Bo~ong!” (She playfully teases him, then runs away.)

[Beat: Gutgeori, Jajinmori]

(Bune, enjoying the chase, dances seductively to the beat. The monk, captivated by Bune, dances alongside her, overwhelmed by lust. The scene is further complicated when *Chorengi* enters, observing the ludicrous spectacle with amusement.)

Chorengi: “Ha ha ha ha~ This is hilarious!”
(laughing hysterically)

Monk & Bune: (The monk and Bune, caught in their act, scramble away in embarrassment, with the monk carrying Bune away.)

Chorengi: (continues laughing, mocking the situation, then exits.)

7. *Yangban & Seonbi Madang (Noble & Scholar Stage)*

- Roles: *Yangban*, *Seonbi*, *Bune*, *Chorengi*, *Halmi*, *Baekjeong*, *Beolchae*

- Beat: *Gutgeori*, *Jajinmori*

- Dance Movements: *Ogumchum*, *Mongduri* dance, *Deotbaegichum*, dignified *Yangban* walk, *Seonbi* walk

- Dialogues: Present

After *Chorengi* exits, he calls out for the noblemen to appear.

Chorengi: “Dear sirs! Dear sirs! Dear high sirs, come out!”

(At *Chorengi*’s call, *Yangban* enters, holding a fan, followed by *Seonbi*, dressed in jade-green clothes and wearing a hat. Bune follows, playfully lifting her skirt.)

(*Yangban*’s pompous entrance is mocked by *Chorengi*, who mimics his eight-legged walk and snores, mocking the *Yangban*. However, *Yangban*, unaware, continues his dignified entrance. In the middle of the stage, *Yangban* and



Figure 10: *Choraengi* and *Imae* humorously expose the hypocrisy of the social elite, providing moments of enjoyment and laughter for the audience.



Figure 11: A dialogue between the Seonbi and Yangban characters where they boast of their noble lineage, highlighting the pretense and vanity of the upper class during the Joseon Dynasty.

Seonbi dance together joyfully, while Chorengi flirts with Bune, occasionally teasing her and then pretending to get caught.)

Chorengi: “Dear sirs, your appearance is great!” (repeating this, moving from right to left of Yangban)

Yangban: (getting annoyed by Chorengi’s repeated compliments) “Hey, enough!”

Chorengi: “Dear sirs, let’s greet each other!”

Yangban: (nodding) “Yes, let’s introduce ourselves.”

Seonbi: (also nodding, holding his tobacco pipe) “Yes, that’s good.”

Yangban & Seonbi: (They bow deeply to each other. Chorengi, seeing this, quickly sneaks

in and interferes with their bowing, mocking them.)

Chorengi: “He he he he~ I’m here too.” (mocking their bowing ritual)

Yangban: (shocked and angry, hits Chorengi with his fan) “You rascal!”

Seonbi: “How rude!”

Yangban: “Indeed, such behavior.”

Seonbi: “Even with your status, can you discipline him properly?”

Yangban: “Ha ha~ What more can be done?”

Seonbi: “Yes, you call yourself a noble?”

Yangban: “Why, what do you think of me?”

Chorengi: “He he he he, dear sirs! I know about

the six classics.” (mocking their knowledge and status)

Seonbi: “Oh, yes, the six classics.” (agreeing with Chorengi)

Yangban: (still annoyed) “That’s enough.”

Chorengi: (mimicking their actions) “He he he he~”

Yangban: (angry) “You rascal!”

Chorengi: (mocking again) “He he he~”

Yangban: (in a softer tone, turning to Bune) “Bune, come here.”

Bune: (approaching playfully) “Bo~ong”

Seonbi: (delighted) “Ah, it’s Bune!”

Chorengi: (mocking Seonbi’s joy) “He he he~”

Yangban: “Yes, Bune.”

Bune: (playfully) “Yes, my lord.”

Yangban: “Shall we dance together?”

[Beat: Gutgeori]

Yangban & Bune: (dancing together, while Chorengi mocks them.)

(Seonbi, seeing this, feels jealous and tries to intervene, but Yangban and Bune continue dancing, ignoring him.)

Seonbi: (feeling slighted, approaches Bune) “Bune, come here.”

Bune: (playfully moving away from Yangban to Seonbi) “Bo~ong”

Chorengi: (mocking Seonbi) “He he he~”

Yangban: (noticing Seonbi with Bune, feels jealous) “How dare he!”

Seonbi: (angry) “This is absurd!”

Yangban: “Indeed, it is.”

Seonbi: “Then what should we do?”

Yangban: “Let’s have a drink.”

Seonbi: “Yes, let’s.”

[Beat: Jajinmori]



Figure 12: Villagers conducting the Dangje ritual at Guksindang, Samsindang, and Seonangdang, praying for peace and prosperity in Hahoe Village.

(They sit together, sharing a drink, while Chorengi continues to mock them. Halmi, noticing this, intervenes, trying to join in the dance, but is rebuffed by Yangban and Seonbi.)

Halmi: (angry) “You rascals!”

Yangban & Seonbi: “How dare you!”

Chorengi: “He he he~”

(The scene ends with everyone dancing together in a chaotic, humorous manner.)

8. *Dangje (Village Rite)*

- Roles: All performers
- Beat: *Gutgeori, Jajinmori*
- Location: Seonangdang, Goksindang, Samsindang

The *Dangje* is a village ritual performed twice a year, on the full moon day of January and the eighth day of April. However, since the 1970s, only the January *Dangje* has been performed. The ritual begins early in the morning of the full moon day, and the villagers prepare offerings, which they carry to the Seonangdang on the hillside.

The ritual leader, *Sanju*, leads the ceremony, and the ritual assistant, *Yusa*, helps prepare the offerings. The offerings include uncooked food such as fish and fruits, as well as traditional items like the pig’s head and makgeolli (rice wine). The offerings are arranged on the altar, and a lamp is lit with sesame oil. After the offerings are set, *Sanju* prays, asking for the well-being of the village and a good harvest. The villagers also offer their prayers. The ritual includes burning paper prayers, Soji and a communal feast.

After the *Dangje*, the villagers hold a village meeting to discuss important matters. The ritual concludes with the return of the villagers to their homes.

9. *Honrye Madang (Wedding Ceremony Stage)*

- Roles: *Gaksi, Yangban, Seonbi, Halmi, Bune, Chorengi, Imae, Yusa*
- Beat: *Jajinmori*
- Dance Movements: Role-specific dances
- Dialogues: Present (following the ceremony’s progression)

In the *Honrye Madang*, a traditional wedding ceremony is performed. *Gaksi*, as the bride, is escorted by her attendants, and *Yangban* or *Seonbi* acts as the groom. The ceremony includes bowing to each other, drinking ritual wine, and symbolic gestures representing the union of the couple.

Honrye Madang continues with the ceremony, where *Gaksi* and *Yangban* or *Seonbi* partake in traditional wedding rituals. The participants perform various symbolic acts, such as bowing to each other, drinking from a shared cup of wine, and exchanging gifts, symbolizing their union and the blessings for their new life together.

The wedding ceremony is performed to honor the village’s guardian deity, symbolizing the protection and prosperity of the village. The ceremony is kept secret, and only selected villagers participate in the ritual.

The ceremony is deeply respectful and formal, reflecting traditional Korean customs surrounding marriage. The community often views this ritual as a blessing for prosperity and harmony, not only for the couple but also for the entire village.

10. *Sinbang Madang (Bridal Chamber Stage)*

- Roles: *Gaksi, Seonbi*
- Beat: *Jajinmori*
- Dance Movements: Role-specific dances
- Dialogues: None



Figure 13: A symbolic marriage scene between the goddess Gaksi and a human, representing the union between gods and humans.

The *Sinbang Madang* is performed on a prepared platform, where the groom, *Seonbi* and bride, Gaksi symbolically consummate their marriage. The groom unties the bride's clothing, and they lie down together, symbolizing the couple's union. The scene represents the villagers' desire for prosperity and fertility, with the guardian deity ensuring the village's well-being.

After the wedding ceremony, the couple proceeds to the *Sinbang Madang*, symbolizing the bridal chamber. This scene typically involves a symbolic gesture of the bride and groom lying down together, representing the consummation of the marriage. The modesty and simplicity of the actions highlight the sacredness of this union.

The *Sinbang Madang* emphasizes the importance of fertility and the continuation of the family line, which are critical values in traditional Korean society. The presence of the community in witnessing this symbolic act reinforces the collective blessings for the couple's future.

11. *Hertcheonggeori Gut*

- Roles: Shaman
- Beat: *Gut* rhythm used in shamanic rituals
- Dance Movements: None
- Dialogues: None

After the *Sinbang Madang*, a *Hertcheonggeori Gut* is performed at Hertcheon, a small stream at the village entrance. The shaman leads the ritual to send off any remaining evil spirits and cleanse the village, ensuring a return to normalcy after the ritual period. The

Hertcheonggeori Gut serves to purify the village and send off any lingering negative energies or spirits that may have accumulated during the *Byeolsingut*.

The shaman performs chants and dances, often accompanied by the rhythmic beats of traditional instruments. This ritual symbolizes the closing of the spiritual and ritualistic activities, ensuring that the village returns to a state of normalcy and peace.

IV. Symbolism and Role of Masks

The masks used in the *Hahoe Byeolsingut* mask dance each carry different symbols and meanings, conveying social, cultural, and religious stories of the villagers.

A. *Gaksi Mask* (각시탈)

The Gaksi mask symbolizes the village guardian deity, representing divine protection and purity. The mask features soft facial lines and a serene smile, with black hair accentuating her mystique. As a central figure in the mask dance, the Gaksi mask brings well-being and abundance to the villagers.

B. *Yangban Mask* (양반탈)

Representing the aristocratic class of Korea, the Yangban mask features an orange face with an asymmetrical expression. It criticizes the authority and hypocrisy of the Yangban class, satirizing social class discrepancies. The mask's prominent hooked nose and thin eyebrows symbolize arrogance and superiority.

C. *Seonbi Mask* (선비탈)

The Seonbi mask symbolizes scholars of the Joseon Dynasty, embodying ideals of learning and morality. Its red base with deep wrinkles and large hooked nose reflects the conflict between scholarly ideals and real-world challenges. The



Figure 14: A display of Hahoe masks representing diverse characters, including Monk, Gaksi, Butcher, Yangban, Choraengi, Imae, Bune, Halmi, Juji, and Seonbi.

Seonbi mask plays a significant role in expressing moral dilemmas and social injustices.

D. *Bune Mask* (부네탈)

The Bune mask symbolizes the beauty and wisdom of traditional Korean courtesans. It features an alluring smile and arched eyebrows, portraying the role of enticing male characters during performances. The mask also represents the complex emotions and social status of women, playing a key role in the mask dance.

E. *Choraengi Mask* (초랭이탈)

Representing the servant class, the *Choraengi* mask symbolizes suppressed emotions and grievances. It features a large nose and wide smile, playing a role in satirizing social hypocrisy. The character exposes the hypocrisy of the *Yangban* and *Seonbi* classes, highlighting the realities faced by the lower class.

F. *Halmi Mask* (할미탈)

The *Halmi* mask depicts an old woman, symbolizing discrimination and oppression in a patriarchal society. Her deep wrinkles and sparse teeth represent a life of suffering, expressing the sacrifices and endurance of elderly women during the performance.

G. *Imae Mask* (이매탈)

The *Imae* mask represents a character with intellectual disabilities, characterized by a comical smile and asymmetrical eyes. This mask satirizes social prejudice and discrimination, delivering important social messages during performances.

H. *Chung Mask* (중탈)

Depicting a monk with intense eyes and a wide forehead, the *Chung mask* exposes religious hypocrisy, expressing the conflict between



Figure 15: Performers, from left to right, wearing masks of Gaksi, Yangban, Seonbi, Bune, Choraengi, Halmi, Imae, Monk, and Butcher, perform every weekend in Hahoe Village, Andong.

human desires and asceticism. It plays a significant role in addressing religious criticism in the mask dance.

I. Baekjeong Mask (백정탈)

The Baekjeong mask symbolizes the butcher, a member of the lower class in the Joseon Dynasty. With a long face and prominent chin, it expresses the fatigue and hardship of daily life, criticizing social discrimination and injustice.

J. Juji Mask (주지탈)

The Juji mask depicts a mythical creature resembling a dragon, symbolizing protection and prosperity for the village. As a sacred animal, it carries meanings of warning and divine protection, playing an important role in the mask dance

V. Conclusion

The *Hahoe Byeolsingut* mask dance goes beyond mere cultural performance, representing Korea's deep spiritual roots and communal values. This ritual played a vital role in agrarian society, ensuring survival through prayers for abundance and protection from disasters. It also critiques social inequalities while strengthening community solidarity, embodying embedded historical and cultural messages of Korea.

As part of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage, the *Hahoe Byeolsingut* mask dance transcends generations, preserving Korea's history, spirituality, and collective identity. By integrating shamanistic rituals, performances, and communal bonding, it serves as a bridge between the past and the present, offering profound insights into Korea's artistic, social, and religious life.



Figure 16: Researchers actively engaged in performing the UNESCO-recognized Hahoe Mask Dance, preserving this cultural heritage.

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Glossary of Terms and Explanations

(Terms are listed with Korean pronunciation, Hangeul, and English explanation)

I. Religious and Ritual Terms

1. Byeolsingut (별신굿) - A special shaman ritual for the village deity, performed to pray for village's well-being

2. Gangsin (강신) - The act of invoking or welcoming the deity
3. Naerim (내림) - A ritual inviting spirits to descend
4. Seonangsin (서낭신) - Village guardian deity
5. Samshin (삼신) - Deity associated with childbirth and motherhood
6. Soji (소지) - Paper prayers or offerings burned during rituals

II. Ritual Places And Objects

1. Dongsa (동사) - The East Shrine, part of the shrine complex
2. Naerimdae (내림대) - A smaller ritual pole used to invite spirits
3. Seonangdae (서낭대) - A ritual pole representing the Seonangsin
4. Seonangdang (서낭당) - Shrine dedicated to the village guardian deity
5. Seonghwangdang (성황당) - Shrine dedicated to village guardians
6. Hwasan (화산) - Mountain where the Seonangdang is located

III. Ritual Participants and Roles

1. Mudang (무당) - Korean shaman who conducts ceremonies
2. Sanju (산주) - The ritual leader or officiant
3. Yusa (유사) - Ritual assistant who helps with preparations
4. Sangsoe (상쇠) - Leader of the pungmul troupe

IV. Performance Characters

A. Main Characters

1. Gaksi (각시) - Female spirit character
2. Yangban (양반) - Member of traditional aristocracy
3. Bune (부네) - Seductive female character
4. Chorengi (초랭이) - Clownish character
5. Halmi (할미) - Old woman character
6. Imae (이매) - Character with intellectual disabilities
7. Juji (주지) - Characters in hemp sacks

B. Performance Stages (Madang)

1. Mudong Madang (무동마당) - Mudong performance stage

2. Baekjeongmadang (백정마당) - Butcher's stage
3. Pagyesung Madang (파계승마당) - Defrocked monk's stage
4. Honrye Madang (혼례마당) - Wedding ceremony stage
5. Sinbang Madang (신방마당) - Bridal chamber stage

V. Music And Dance

A. Musical Instruments

1. Buk (북) - Traditional drum
2. Janggu (장구) - Hourglass-shaped drum
3. Jing (징) - Large gong
4. Kkwaenggari (꽹과리) - Small gong
5. Taepyeongso (태평소) - Wind instrument similar to oboe

B. Musical Terms

1. Gilgunak (길군악) - Traditional ritual music
2. Honryeonmachi (훈련마치) - Rhythm also known as Jajin Gutgeori
3. Jajinmori (자진모리) - Fast rhythm
4. Nanta (난타) - Percussion performance
5. Pungmul (풍물) - Traditional folk music ensemble

C. Dance Movements

1. Deotbaegichum (덧배기춤) - Lively dance with strong steps
2. Eongdungichum (엄덩이춤) - Hip dance
3. Mongdurichum (몽두리춤) - Comic movement dance
4. Ogumchum (오금춤) - Subtle leg movements
5. Sonchum (손춤) - Hand dance

VI. Traditional Items and Objects

1. Bangeo (밤어) - Amberjack fish used in rituals
2. Cheok (척) - Traditional measurement unit (30.3cm)
3. Chima (치마) - Traditional skirt
4. Dojakdae (도작대) - Fish platter
5. Jeogori (저고리) - Traditional jacket
6. Makgeolli (막걸리) - Traditional rice wine

VII. Performance Expressions

1. Bo~ong (보-옹) - Playful exclamation
2. Eolssu (얼쑤) - Encouragement exclamation
3. Sungnyeongsu (술령수) - Call-and-response chant



Xuan Pha Performance (*Trò Xuân Phả*)

The Unique Mask Dance of Vietnam

PHAN THUẬN THẢO

In a few forms of mask dance in Vietnam, the dances of Xuan Pha performance (*Trò Xuân Phả*) are considered the most representative. This is a suite of five folk dances from Xuân Phả village in Thanh Hóa province,¹ located at the border between northern and central Vietnam. Due to its special historical and cultural significance, *Trò Xuân Phả* is regarded as truly exceptional and was recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage in 2016.

Trò Xuân Phả comprises five dances, performed annually on the 9th and 10th of the lunar February as part of the worship ceremony dedicated to the village's Tutelary Deity. The dances are named *Hoa Lang*, *Chiêm Thành* (Champa), *Ai Lao* (Laos), *Tú Huân* (*Lục Hồn Nhung*), and *Ngô Quốc* (China under the Ming dynasty), representing five neighbouring countries. These dances depict the image of envoys from those countries paying homage to the king



Hoa Lang Dance³



Chiêm Thành Dance



Ai Lao Dance



Tú Huần (Lục Hồn Nhung) Dance



Ngô Quốc Dance

of ancient Vietnam (*Đại Việt*²). Characterized by distinct costumes and movements, each country performs in sequence to honor and celebrate the *Đại Việt* king. Three of these dances – *Hoa Lang*, *Chiêm Thành* and *Tú Huân* – use masks. As these five dances are part of a suite and are closely related in many aspects, this article will focus on the three mask dances within the broader context of *Trò Xuân Phả* in Vietnam.

Origin

The dances in this suite are performed in various villages along the *Mã* and *Chu* rivers, the two principal rivers of *Thanh Hóa* province. However, only a few villages have all five dances, with *Xuân Phả* village being one such location. According to local legend, *Trò Xuân Phả* dates back to the *Đinh* Dynasty (968–980). The legend recounts that during a military campaign, while the forces of the *Đinh* Dynasty were passing by

the *Chu* River in *Xuân Phả* village, they received a deity's omen in a dream which aided them in securing victory. In gratitude, the king conferred upon the village's tutelary deity the title "Great Ocean's Dragon King - Royal General" (*Đại Hải Long Vương Hoàng Lang Tướng Quân*) and gifted the dances of *Trò Xuân Phả*.

Modern researchers believe that *Trò Xuân Phả* could not have originated as early as the legend suggests. This scepticism arises from the fact that, in the 10th century, Vietnam was not yet a formidable country with extensive diplomatic ties to foreign countries. Moreover, there is no evidence of these dances in *Hoa Lư*, the capital of the *Đinh* Dynasty, located roughly 100 kilometres northeast of *Xuân Phả* village.

Another theory proposes that *Trò Xuân Phả* may have originated from the dance called "Vassals coming to tribute" (*Chư hầu lai triều*) of the Later *Lê* dynasty (1428–1789), which

originated in the *Lam Sơn* region, located in the same *Thọ Xuân* district as *Xuân Phả* village. The Later *Lê* dynasty was a powerful era that successfully defeated the Ming army (China) in their invasion of Vietnam between 1407 and 1427, subsequently transforming Vietnam into a strong country and expanding its territory to the south. Historical records mentioned that neighbouring countries such as Laos, Java, Champa, and Yunnan came to pay tribute to the kings of the *Lê* dynasty in the 15th century⁴. These records also note a dance called “Defeating the Ming, winning the battle” (*Bình Ngô phá trận*) performed in the *Lê* royal court in 1449, which was choreographed by King *Lê Thái Tông* (1433–1442) to honour his father, King *Lê Thái Tổ* (1428–1433), who had vanquished the Ming invaders and established the *Lê* dynasty⁵; and “*Chư hầu lai triều*” – the dance depicted the scene of neighbouring countries coming to pay tribute to the *Lê* king. Both of these court dances were performed during ceremonial offerings at the *Lê* kings’ mausoleums in *Lam Sơn*, *Thanh Hóa*⁶ in 1455. These two royal court dances are no longer in existence; however it is believed that the “*Chư hầu lai triều*” dance was transformed into the folk dances of *Trò Xuân Phả*, which have been performed by the local community in the annual ceremonies dedicated to the village’s Tutelary Deity and preserved until today.

Originating from a 15th-century court dance tradition, the dances of *Trò Xuân Phả* have traversed a long history and have likely undergone various transformations. The dances bear symbolic meanings, conveying mysterious messages from the past that even today’s performers are unable to fully comprehend.

1. Characteristics of Mask Dances

In the three dances using masks of *Trò Xuân Phả*, performers wear the masks in different ways. In the *Hoa Lang* and *Chiêm Thành* dances, the dancers wear the masks by mouth, while in the

Tú Huân dance, the masks are worn over their faces by a string that wraps around their heads.

a. *Hoa Lang* Dance

Among the five countries represented in *Trò Xuân Phả* that came to pay tribute to the king of Vietnam, the exact identity of *Hoa Lang* remains uncertain. Some theorists propose that *Hoa Lang* symbolizes Holland (*Hòa Lan* in Vietnamese). This theory is supported by several factors: the name “*Hoa Lang*” bears a resemblance to “*Hòa Lan*”; the dancers wear masks that are white or yellow with straight noses and mustaches, resembling the appearance of Westerners; the headgear is made of cowhide, with a tall shape similar to a Western fedora. In reality, since the 17th century, Vietnam began trading with foreign countries, including Holland.

Another theory suggests that *Hoa Lang* refers to Korea, as Holland is too far away, while Koreans also have similar skin color and facial features to the mask and wear hats similar to those in the *Hoa Lang* dance. Additionally, the lyrics of the accompanying song include the lines: “We are now returning to the Northern country / Far from the southern corner of the sky”. “Northern country” here likely refers to Korea, as opposed to Holland, which is situated in the West. The dance also features a scene of rowing a boat, which could imply how either the Dutch or Koreans might have traveled to Vietnam in the past.

The *Hoa Lang* dance begins with a unicorn figure, represented by two performers in costume, symbolizing good fortune. This is followed by the appearance of a leader, who dances with a glaive. Next, two individuals disguised as horses perform a whip dance, and finally, ten soldiers arrange themselves in two parallel lines, performing with fans. The dance concludes with a boat rowing scene, symbolizing a farewell as they set sail to return to their homeland. In this section, a female character, dressed in traditional Vietnamese attire, dances

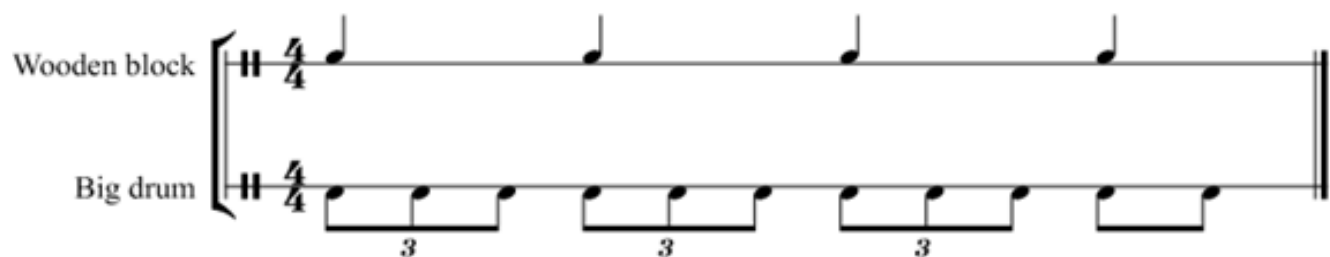




alongside the leader. This may represent the harmonious interaction between the foreign delegation and the local Vietnamese people in ancient times.

The Hoa Lang dance is performed to the following rhythm of percussion instruments:

The boat rowing scene is accompanied by singing. The song has six verses; here are the first two:



Hoa Lang

Singer: Bùi Văn Hùng
Transcriber: Phan Thuận Thảo

Trò tôi ở bến Huê lang (ở bến Huê lang) Tôi nghe đức
chính tôi sang mà chèo hầu (Tôi nghe đức chính tôi sang mà chèo
hầu) Các quan ta ta bắt mái lên ta chèo cho
đều Đố ai bắt được thời theo à mái này (Đố ai bắt
được thời theo à mái này)

The song carries the melody of traditional folk music, employing a pentatonic scale with a narrow pitch range (from C1 to A1) and a simple rhythm. The lyrics are composed in the traditional Vietnamese verse form. This indicates that, despite the dance's depiction of foreign elements, the music is imbued with Vietnamese local culture.

The dance comprises solo, duet, and group performances, with the third one being the most prominent. The movements are relatively simple and devoid of complex techniques, as the dancers are non-professional. In the group dances, emphasis is placed on uniformity and synchronization of the rhythm of the percussion instruments. The most typical movements can be seen are arm swinging, fan waving, stationary spinning, boat rowing, and hand rolling. The group formations generally consist of two lines

facing the altar, as the dance is performed as an offering to the village's Tutelary Deity.

b. Chiêm Thành Dance

Chiêm Thành (Champa) was a kingdom located in contemporary Central Vietnam, existing from 192 to 1832. It was a neighbouring country to the south of Vietnam, with which it frequently engaged in conflicts, although there were also periods of peaceful relations. The diplomatic exchanges between the two countries are well documented throughout history. The *Chiêm Thành* dance illustrates the Champa delegation's visit to pay tribute to the Đại Việt king.

The *Chiêm Thành* dance features red costumes, the colour associated with the south in the five elements theory (*Thuyết Ngũ hành*). By their mouths, the dancers wear their red-painted



wooden masks that are designed to resemble a tiger's face. The headscarves adorned with two horns cover their heads. The precise symbolism of these elements remains enigmatic and has yet to be fully understood.

The dance commences with the leader performing simple movements and bowing in front of the altar. Subsequently, two attendants representing figurines of servants in the temples or shrines, perform a ritual dance of offering incense. Following that, the leader leads a group of 10 dancers who make shoulder-shaking movements as they line up in two rows in front of the altar, bowing and paying homage. The dance predominantly features shoulder shaking, hopping, flower throwing (where the hands are clenched and then spread outward, simulating the act of throwing flowers up), and spinning, all of which highlight the strength and vitality of the Champa delegation. The dancers are all male, as only they have the strength required for these powerful and decisive movements. The





performance is accompanied by the rhythm of percussion instruments where the sharp, forceful

dance movements synchronize precisely with each strike of the wooden gong.



In the final part of the dance, a female character appears with a fan, fanning the leader and his troops in her dance. Finally, all participants advance to the altar, bow in gratitude, and then withdraw.

c. Tú Huân (Lục Hồn Nhung) Dance

No one can definitively identify which country *Tú Huân* or *Lục Hồn Nhung* represents; it is only hypothesized that it may refer to an ancient tribe that no longer exists. The costume for the *Tú*

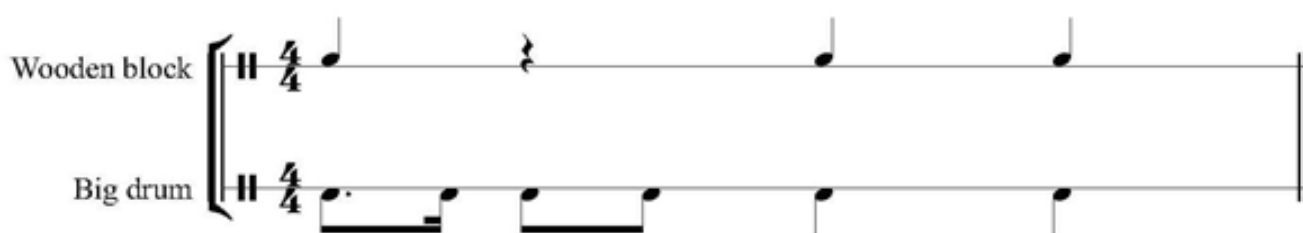
Huân dance is quite peculiar. The performers wear white-painted wooden masks, dark blue shirts with red sashes, white trousers, and the “*loóng*” hats (made of bamboo, with thin bamboo strands resembling hair). The masks indicate the ages of the characters in a family, including the grandmother, mother, and ten children. The ages of the children are depicted by the number of teeth painted on the masks: the first pair of children has one tooth, the second pair has two teeth, the third pair has three teeth, the fourth pair has four teeth, and the fifth pair has five teeth.





The dance begins with the appearance of an elderly woman – the grandmother, accompanied by her attendant. They circle the area, performing the actions of preparing and chewing betel nut before retreating inside. Then the mother enters, hopping while rhythmically striking bamboo clappers as she approaches the altar to bow in reverence. She then leads her ten children, who arrange themselves into two rows

and also bow in front of the altar. All participants danced while playing the bamboo clappers, accompanied by the beats of drums and wooden gongs. The primary movement in this dance is hopping, which includes lateral, forward, and rotational hops. Each change in movement is signaled by a shout. The dance is performed to a rhythmic pattern which has similarities with the previous *Chiêm Thành* dance:



2. Preservation of *Trò Xuân Phả* in Modern Society

Alongside *Trò Xuân Phả*, the mask dances possess a long history and distinct characteristics, reflecting the diplomatic exchange and the national pride of ancient Vietnam with neighbouring countries. These dances have been passed down through many centuries, shortly interrupted during periods of war, and subsequently revived since the 1990s. Recognizing the unique value of *Trò Xuân Phả*, the government and local community have made concerted efforts to preserve it through practical measures:

- Continuation of annual ceremonies honoring the village deity and other rituals to provide a performance environment for *Trò Xuân Phả*.
- Establishment of clubs where residents, including amateur artists, can practice and pass on the traditions.
- Increase in promotion through mass media to enhance public awareness of the unique value of *Trò Xuân Phả*.
- Inscription of *Trò Xuân Phả* in the List of National Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- Official recognition of certain distinguished artists with the title of “Folk Master,” in which 14 artists have received the title of “Meritorious Master” to date.
- Transmitting this tradition to the younger generation, particularly high school students. There are approximately 250 students who are able to perform the dances of *Trò Xuân Phả* so far.
- Conducting research and documentation for future generations.
- Organizing competitions between villages to encourage active practice and performance of the dances.



Despite these efforts, there remain tasks that need further attention. Current research on *Trò Xuân Phả* has so far only reached the descriptive stage, leaving many mysteries and messages from the past still undeciphered. Additionally, attempts by professional art troupes to adapt these dances for stage performances have not been successful, suggesting that these ancient dances may not easily integrate into modern life, which is separated from them by centuries.

It can be stated that the current condition of *Trò Xuân Phả* and its mask dances is well-preserved. Supported by the government's policy of preserving and promoting national cultural heritage, alongside the local community's pride in their cultural traditions and strong public supports, it is highly probable that local residents will continue safeguarding this tradition for future generations.

End Note

1. *Thanh Hóa* province is known as the birthplace of several Vietnamese dynasties, including the Early *Lê* (980–1009), the *Hồ* (1400–1407), the Later *Lê* (1428–1789), and the *Nguyễn* (1802–1945) dynasties. Remnants of the citadel and royal tombs of the Later *Lê* kings still exist in the region, and these are believed to have a connection to the dances of *Trò Xuân Phả*.
2. Đại Việt: the old name of Vietnam.
3. The pictures in this article are from the Meritorious Master *Bùi Văn Hùng* (*Xuân Trường* Village, *Thọ Xuân* District, *Thanh Hóa* Province).

4. Hoàng Anh Nhân, Phạm Minh Khang, Hoàng Hải, 1997, 33.
5. Lê Văn Hưu, Ngô Sĩ Liên, 372.
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A Tuong opera veteran.



Vietnamese Traditional Mask Culture with History and National Pride

KIM IN-SEONG

Vietnam is well known for its unique culture and rich traditional arts. Among all the arts, the traditional mask culture of Vietnam is one of the distinctive art forms with a long history and deep meaning. Masks have played an important role in traditional performances, religious ceremonies, and social events in Vietnam and have been closely connected to the lives of Vietnamese people for centuries. This research article aims to explore the origins of Vietnamese traditional masks, their various types, and their role in contemporary Vietnamese society.



Vietnamese traditional mask artisan



Southern Vietnam mask



Mask from traditional Vietnamese opera

1. The Origin of Vietnamese Traditional Masks

The origin of Vietnamese traditional masks is closely related to Vietnam's historical background. Vietnamese traditional masks were mainly used in religious rituals or traditional performances, which were part of the ritual of praying. This prayer used to be performed to ask for abundance and well-being from gods and ancestors in Vietnam's agricultural society. Early Vietnamese masks were mainly made of materials such as clay, wood, bamboo, paper, and cloth, with each mask carrying specific meanings and symbolism.



Masks from early Vietnam with shamanistic meaning

2. Types of Vietnamese Traditional Masks

Vietnamese traditional masks vary depending on their purpose and the context in which they are used. Vietnamese masks are primarily used to depict characters and stories. Representative masks include “*Ông Lượ*” and “*Bà Mẹ*.” *Ông Lượ* represents a wise and compassionate old man, while *Bà Mẹ* symbolizes fertility and

prosperity and is depicted as a grandmother. These masks are often used during New Year festivals or religious ceremonies, where people wear them and dance to perform rituals wishing for people’s happiness and blessings.



Vietnamese folk masks called Ông and Bà

“*Tò He*,” a popular traditional mask from ancient Vietnam is still in existence till the present day. This mask originated from children’s play culture and was primarily used to entertain children. *Tò He* masks typically depicts mythical figures, animals, and legendary heroes, characterized by vibrant colours and lively designs.



Vietnamese traditional masks called “*Tò He*”

Additionally, Vietnamese traditional masks have distinct features depending on the region. For instance, masks from the northern region are mainly used in religious ceremonies, often

depicting figures or animals from ancient myths. On the other hand, southern masks are used in performing arts, with a more colorful and dramatic expression. These regional differences reflect Vietnam's diverse cultural backgrounds and have greatly influenced mask designs and usage.



"Tò He" is designed as a miniature festival scene with a set symbolizing wishes for prosperity.

3. The Inheritance of Traditional Masks and Vietnamese Mask Dance Today

In modern Vietnam, traditional masks remain an important cultural element. Especially during festivals like the Mid-Autumn Festival, wearing and enjoying masks is a tradition that continues in many Vietnamese families. Furthermore, traditional masks still play a vital role in modern Vietnamese performing arts. For example, in Vietnamese traditional operas such as "*Tuồng*" and "*Chèo*," masks are used as important tools to express the characters' personalities and emotions.

The modern use of masks goes beyond merely inheriting tradition and serves as a way for Vietnamese people to express their identity and cultural pride. The younger generation of Vietnam is rediscovering their cultural roots through masks and reinterpreting them in contemporary ways, developing new forms of art and culture.



Makeup and mask of a traditional Vietnamese opera actor



Traditional Vietnamese opera



Northern Vietnam's traditional mask

Vietnamese Traditional Mask Culture

Vietnamese traditional mask culture has played a significant role in the historical, religious, and social contexts of Vietnam. These traditional masks are not just artistic works; they are cultural heritage embedded with deep history and meaning. With a variety of regional and ethnic backgrounds, Vietnamese masks



Traditional Vietnamese masks are still passed down in modern times (Vietnamese traditional mask artisan)

reflect the unique culture of each region. Eventoday,theyarerecognizedfortheiroriginality and artistic value and are one of the important elementsrepresentingVietnam'sculturalidentity.

Through Vietnamese traditional mask art, we can understand Vietnam's rich culture and history and contribute to the preservation and sharing of Asian traditional arts.

Vietnamesemasksarenotjustartisticcreations but significant cultural assets symbolizing the identity and cultural heritage of the Vietnamese people. Their value will continue to shine in the future.



8th Century Gigaku Mask (Gigakumen) is attributed to Kiei-shi, perhaps representing Shishiko, Suikoju, or Taikoji.
Photo Source: Harvard Art Museums



Japanese Masks and Mask Culture

PAEK KWANG SIK

Translated & Edited by PARK YEON-OCK

The History and Development of Japanese Mask Culture

The mask culture of Japan represents a rich cultural heritage that has evolved over thousands of years. Far from being mere artistic tools, Japanese masks have become essential elements of cultural heritage, embodying religious, ceremonial, and symbolic significance.

Historically, masks in Japan were used for various purposes, including hunting, healing rituals, and prayers. Early masks were made of clay during the Yayoi period (300 BCE–300 CE), marking the beginning of Japan's mask-making tradition. In the 7th century, with the introduction of *Gigaku* masks, Japan's mask culture underwent significant development.

This tradition traces its origins to Buddhist mask traditions from India and Tibet, reaching Japan through China and Baekje, an ancient Korean kingdom. A pivotal figure in this cultural transmission was Mimaji, a Baekje native who introduced *Gigaku* (伎楽) to Japan in 612 CE, establishing the foundation for Japanese mask theatre.

The roots of Japanese mask theatre lie deep in Buddhist ritual performances from India and Tibet. In India, the Charya dance incorporated masks in Buddhist ceremonies, while in Tibet, the Cham masked dance played a crucial role in Buddhist rituals. These masks symbolized deities and sacred beings, with performances serving to bridge the human and divine realms. According to Bruce Jameson, the Cham dances enabled participants to experience sacred presence through visual and sensory engagement, effectively reinforcing Buddhist teachings through performance.

The performance of Cham in Tibet became integral to Vajrayana Buddhist rituals, where masks were used to embody gods, demons, and mythical creatures. Scholars such as Benito Ortolani argue that this ritualistic use of masks, combining spiritual and performative elements, played a critical role in the diffusion of Buddhist culture from Tibet and India to other parts of East Asia. These masked rituals were subsequently transmitted to China, the Korean peninsula, and eventually Japan.

During the period of the Wu Dynasty in China, the Indian and Tibetan traditions of masked performance were adopted and further developed within Buddhist rituals. These performances became central to court ceremonies, particularly in regions like Baekje, which served as a hub for cultural exchange in East Asia. It was during this period that Mimaji, a native of Baekje, traveled to China to study *Gigaku*. After mastering this art, he introduced it to Japan in 612 CE, where his version of *Gigaku* became the earliest form of masked theatre in Japan, blending elements of Buddhist ritual with Chinese performance art.

Following its introduction, *Gigaku* gained prominence in Japan as a ceremonial art. During the *Heian* period (794-1185 CE), it was widely performed in the imperial court and eventually became part of the larger landscape of Japanese

religious and artistic expression. Eric C. Rath, an expert on Japanese performing arts, highlights how *Gigaku* not only influenced Buddhist rituals but also merged with *Shinto* traditions, creating a unique blend of spiritual symbolism and aesthetic expression.

As the Japanese court integrated these performances into its religious practices, mask theatre further developed into the refined forms of *Noh* (能) and *Kyogen* (狂言) during the *Muromachi* period (1336-1573 CE). Zeami, a master of *Noh* theatre, emphasized the power of masks in creating *Yugen* (幽玄), a concept of subtle beauty and profound grace. In Zeami's view, masks were not only tools for performing emotions but also symbols that elevated the spiritual experience of both performers and audiences.

In the centuries following its development, Japanese mask theatre continued to evolve and was eventually recognized worldwide for



its cultural significance. In 2001, *Nohgaku* (能楽) was inscribed on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list, highlighting the global importance of Japan's masked theatre traditions. Today, *Noh* and *Kyogen* continue to be performed internationally, representing both Japan's deep cultural heritage and its history of intercultural exchange. This history demonstrates the remarkable journey of Japanese mask culture, from its Buddhist origins through its development into a uniquely Japanese art form, continuing to influence and inspire audiences worldwide.

Types of Japanese Masks

In *Noh*, *Kyogen*, and *Kabuki* theatre, particularly in *Nohgaku* (*Noh* theatre), there are approximately 250 types of *Noh* masks (*Nohmen*), with about 60 basic forms. While there are around 60 basic types, today it's said that there are over 200 varieties in existence.

Broadly, these masks can be categorized into old man masks, demon masks, female masks, ghost

masks, and male masks, although classification methods may slightly differ among researchers. In practical use, the classification of *Noh* masks is not absolute. Performers make decisions based on a comprehensive assessment, considering the expression, dignity, and atmosphere each mask conveys, as well as its relationship to the play's title and costumes. Additionally, when an actor performs without a mask, it's called "*Hitamen*" (bare face). Even in this case, the actor doesn't express emotions through facial expressions; instead, the actor's face itself becomes the mask. *Noh* and *Kyogen* masks play crucial roles in *Nohgaku* performances.

Masks made from the *Muromachi* period (1336-1573) to the *Azuchi-Momoyama* period (1573-1603) are considered prototype masks, and subsequent masks are reproductions of these basic forms. The *Noh* masks are used on stage, even if of the same type, and have unique expressions and characteristics due to differences in era, craftsman, and frequency of use on stage, no two masks are exactly the same.

Noh Masks



Ko-omote [小姫], Edo period, wood with pigments (left)
Hannya [般若], Edo period, wood with pigments (right)



Okina Mask (翁面, okinamen) Hakushikijō Mask (白色尉, hakushikijō)

Used on special occasions: These masks are used in the performance of “Okina” (翁), which is staged only on special occasions such as new year.



Male Mask (男面, otokomen) Chūjō Mask (中将, chūjō)

Male masks represent all male characters except the elderly. Expresses males from boys to middle-aged men.



Jō Mask (尉面, zōmen) Kozō Mask (小尉, kozō)

Jo mask represents elderly men of all social classes. Characterized by high cheekbones, a lean form, with a beard, and planted white eyebrows.



Female Mask (女面, onnamen) Ko-omote Mask (小面, koomote)

The female mask is representative in *Noh* theatre. This mask expresses various female characters, from elderly women to young women.



Vengeful Spirit Mask (怨霊面, onryōmen) Hannya Mask (般若, hannya)

The powerful presence of Hannya is overwhelming. It is a mask representing spirits, both living and dead.



Kyogen Mask (狂言面, kyōgenmen) Kokushikijō Mask (黒色尉, kokushikijō)

Used exclusively for the *Okina* (翁, old man) character. A 'senior mask' used by the *Sanbasō* performer in *Kyogen*, performed only on special occasions such as New Year.



Demon Mask (鬼面, kimen) Kobeshimi Mask (小べし見, kobeshimi)

As the name suggests, *Kobeshimi* mask is a mask for demons. Used to represent supernatural beings such as *oni* (demons) and *tengu*.



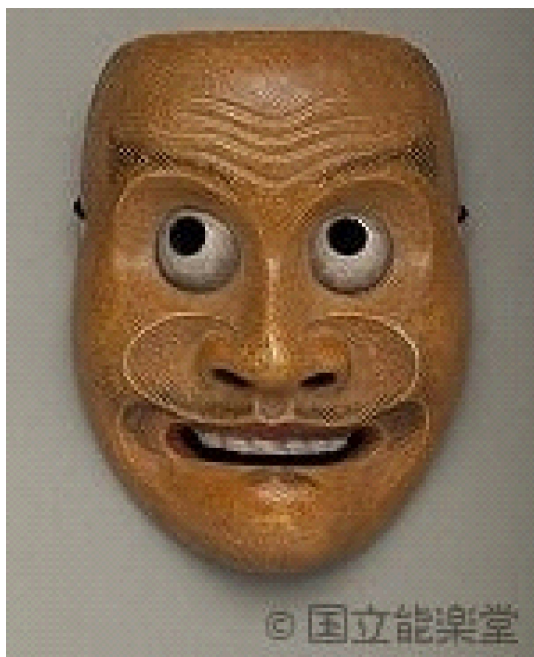
Buaku Mask (武悪, buaku)

Buaku mask is a face that is fierce yet endearing. This is used to represent beings from other worlds, such as gods and demons.



Shikome Mask (醜女, shikome)

Shikome mask is a plump face representing an unattractive woman. While masks are generally not used for female roles, they are worn for characters such as unattractive women and old Buddhist nuns.



Kentoku Mask (賢徳, kentoku)

Kentoku mask is widely used for all non-human roles, ranging from animals such as horses, cows, and dogs, to spirits, mythical

creatures like *tengu*, and even monsters in the form of crabs or mushrooms.



Usofuki Mask (囃吹, usofuki)

Usofuki mask is a spirit mask with a humorous expression. This is used to portray spirits of creatures such as mosquitoes and octopuses.

Mask Arts: *Noh*, *Kyogen*, *Kabuki*

(1) *Noh* (能, のう)

Noh is a branch of the traditional Japanese performing art called *Nohgaku* (能楽, *nōgaku*).

It is characterized by performances where actors wear masks called *Nohmen* (能面).

Nohgaku, established as a stage art in the 14th century, is a classical Japanese theater that has been passed down for about 650 years to the present day. It has the longest history among stage arts still performed today.

Noh, developed in the late 14th century, is a masked drama performed with chanting and musical accompaniment. One of its distinctive features is the creation of a dreamlike, mysterious atmosphere where the spirits of the dead often appear as main characters, interacting with

supporting characters from the world of the living.

The characters in *Noh* include not only humans but also gods, demons, *Yokai* (supernatural creatures), and ghosts. Actors express emotions through stylized, minimalist movements as the story unfolds. Also known as *Noh-Kyogen* (能狂言, のうきょうげん) or *Sarugaku* (猿楽, さるがく), it represents classical Japanese performing arts along with *Kabuki*. *Noh* is divided into the masked drama *Noh* (能, のう) and the comedy *Kyogen* (狂言, きょうげん). In *Noh*, the characters appear wearing masks. Traditionally, a *Nohgaku* performance consists of five *Noh* plays interspersed with *Kyogen* pieces, a structure called “*Goban-date*” (五番立, five-play program).

Noh was inscribed as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2001. By the end of the *Muromachi* period, the basic forms of today’s *Nohmen* were completed, and hereditary mask-making traditions were established. In the *Edo* period, excellent masks were often replicated, leading to new developments.

Key figures in the history of *Noh* are *Kan’ami* (観阿弥, 1333-1384) and *Zeami* (世阿弥, 1363-1443). *Kan’ami*, whose stage name was *Kanze* (観世), later adopted the name *Kan’ami* after becoming a monk.

Based in Nara and active in Kyoto, *Kan’ami* laid the foundation for modern *Noh* and is considered, along with his son *Zeami*, to have perfected the art form.

In the *Muromachi* period, *Kan’ami’s Noh* performance in Kyoto caught the eye of the third shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (足利義満). Until then, *Noh* had been performed as offerings at shrines, but it now gained the patronage of the warrior class. Thus, *Noh* was elevated from a commoner’s art to “the *Noh* of the realm,” loved even by the Shogun’s family.

Zeami, who succeeded *Kan’ami*, created the

aesthetic concept of “*Yugen*” (幽玄, profound grace and subtlety) to make *Noh* more appealing to the tastes of aristocrats and samurai families, leading to its great success.

Many of *Zeami’s* works, such as “*Sanemori*” (実盛) and “*Takasago*” (高砂), are still performed on *Noh* stages today.

The lineage of *Kan’ami* and *Zeami* is called the “*Kanze* school,” which is the foremost of the five schools of *Noh’s shite-kata**. It remains the largest faction to which most *Noh* actors belong today.

Shite-kata Five Schools: These are schools of actors who play various roles in *Noh*, including *shite* (main character), *tsure* (accompanying character), *jiutai* (chorus), and *koken* (stage attendant). Besides the *Kanze* school, there are the *Hōshō* school (宝生流), *Komparu* school (金春流), *Kongō* school (金剛流), and *Kita* school (喜多流).

Kyogen, which developed alongside *Noh*, reached its peak in the *Edo* period, establishing three schools: *Ōkura-ryū* (大蔵流), *Izumi-ryū* (和泉流), and *Sagi-ryū* (鷺流).

Until then, *Kyogen* had been more improvisational than *Noh*. Scripts did not appear until 150 years after *Noh*, with the first proper script, “*Tenshō-bon*” (天正本), emerging in 1576. Before that, performances were largely improvised based on simple plot outlines.

Among the three *Kyogen* schools, the *Sagi-ryū* was the most powerful. Affiliated with the *Kanze* school, the leading school of *Noh’s shite-kata*, the *Sagi-ryū* enjoyed the thick patronage of powerful warrior families like the *Tokugawa*, reaching great prosperity.

However, after the *Meiji* restoration and the fall of the *Shogunate*, *Nohgaku* lost its patrons and gradually declined. The *Sagi-ryū*, which had enjoyed the strongest support from the warrior class, collapsed.

The *Ōkura-ryū* and *Izumi-ryū* have been preserved to this day by disciples who inherited the maintenance of the schools from the *Iemoto* (family heads). Although the *Sagi-ryū* school itself has died out, *Sagi-ryū Kyogen* is still being passed down by amateur *Kyogen* performers in places like Yamaguchi City in Yamaguchi Prefecture, Sado City in Niigata Prefecture, and Saga Prefecture.

(2) *Kyogen* (狂言, きょうげん)

Kyogen is a form of comedy that primarily features dialogue depicting the daily lives of medieval commoners in a lighthearted manner. Unlike *Noh*, most *Kyogen* performances are conducted without masks, portraying universal human humour through laughter.

Kyogen evolved from *Sarugaku* (猿楽, さるがく), a traditional Japanese performing art. It is a comedy that refined and developed *Sarugaku's* humour.

The history of *Kyogen* is believed to have been formalized in its current form and relationships from the early to late *Muromachi* period (1336-1573). In the *Azuchi-Momoyama* period (1573-1603), a vast script collection called “*TenshoKyogen-bon*” (天正狂言本), containing 100 performance titles, was compiled. Its contents are almost identical to what is performed today.

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Until then, *Kyogen* had been more improvisational compared to *Noh*. Scripts didn't appear until 150 years after *Noh*, with the first proper script, “*Tensho-bon*” (天正本), emerging in 1576 (Tensho 6). Before that, performances were largely improvised based on simple plot outlines.

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Kanze school of *Noh*, the *Sagi-ryū* enjoyed thick patronage from powerful warrior families like the *Tokugawa*, reaching great prosperity.

(3) *Kabuki* (歌舞伎, かぶき)

Kabuki is a form of traditional Japanese theatre. It originated in 1603 (Keichō 8) in Kyoto with *Izumo no Okuni's yayako odori* and *kabuki odori* performances. It developed during the *Edo* period, evolving through various forms such as *onna-kabuki* (women's kabuki), *wakashū-kabuki* (young men's kabuki), and *yarō-kabuki* (adult men's kabuki), changing due to regulations aimed at curbing moral degeneration.

Kabuki was designated as an Important Intangible Cultural Property of Japan on April 20, 1965. In 2005, it was proclaimed a masterpiece by UNESCO, and in September 2009, it was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The term “*kabuki*” is derived from the verb “*kabuku*” (傾く), an archaic form meaning “to lean” or “to be out of the ordinary.” During the late Sengoku period to the early *Edo* period, it referred to those in Kyoto who preferred eccentric, flashy costumes and unconventional behaviour. Such people were called “*kabukimono*” (かぶき者).

The unique “*kabuki odori*”, which incorporated the novel movements and elaborate decorations of these *kabukimono*, became wildly popular in Kyoto during the *Keichō* era (1596-1615). This is the origin of today's traditional performing art known as “*kabuki*.”

Since *kabuki odori* was primarily performed by women, various *kanji* combinations like 歌舞姫, 歌舞妃, and 歌舞妓 were used, meaning “singing and dancing girls.” The term 歌舞妓 was most commonly used in *Edo*. The current *kanji* 歌舞伎, while used in the *Edo* period, became standardized in modern times.

During the *Edo* period, “*kabuki*” was a colloquial term. Officially, it was called “*kyōgen*”

or “*kyōgen shibai*.” Noh was also referred to by this term.

Differences between *Kabuki*, *Noh*, and *Kyōgen*:

- i. *Kabuki*, started by *Izumo no Okuni*, is a popular theatre form of the *Edo* period.
- ii. *Noh* and *Kyōgen* evolved from *Sarugaku* and *Dengaku*, established in the *Muromachi* period.
- iii. *Kabuki* actors typically wear makeup. The *Noh* actors wear masks. *Kyōgen* actors generally perform without masks.
- iv. *Kabuki* often deals with contemporary issues, while *Noh* focuses on the spiritual world. *Kyōgen* is a short comic interlude performed between *Noh* plays.

(4) Masks and Japanese Culture

Covering and hiding the face holds various meanings. Beyond concealing oneself from others, it is believed that wearing a mask can transform one's personality into that of the deity, spirit, or animal it represents. This belief has led to the use of masks in religious ceremonies, rituals, dances, and theatrical performances since ancient times.

The act of wearing a mask itself is considered to invite the presence of spirits or deities. This concept has been utilized in religious ceremonies and rituals worldwide.

In festivals, covering one's face with a mask allows transformation into non-human forms such as deities. Moreover, as masks allow one to conceal their identity, they have become an indispensable tool in festivals (*matsuri*, 祭り) that welcome and entertain deities who enjoy departures from daily life. Masks have thus become familiar and cherished objects in everyday life.

(5) Key Studies on Japanese Mask Theater: Scholarly Perspectives

A. Benito Ortolani *The Japanese Theatre: From Shamanistic Ritual to Contemporary Pluralism* (Princeton University Press, 1995)

Ortolani's groundbreaking research examines Japanese theatre origins, particularly emphasizing the Buddhist mask traditions from India and Tibet. His work demonstrates how these traditions travelled from China to Japan, evolving into *Gigaku* and subsequently *Noh* theatre. His analysis of *Mimaji*'s role in bringing *Gigaku* to Japan provides crucial insights into the foundations of Japanese masked theatre traditions.

B. Eric C. Rath *The Ethos of Noh: Actors and Their Art* (Harvard University Press, 2004)

Rath's research focuses on the *Muromachi* period's refinement of the *Noh* theatre. His work traces *Noh*'s evolution from earlier masked performances, notably *Gigaku*, and examines how the art form integrated spiritual and aesthetic elements from broader Asian traditions while developing its unique Japanese characteristics.

C. Donald Keene *No and Bunraku: Two Forms of Japanese Theatre* (Columbia University Press, 1966)

Keene offers a comprehensive analysis of *Noh* and *Bunraku*, exploring their development from religious rituals to performance traditions. His work particularly highlights *Gigaku*'s introduction by *Mimaji* and examines the synthesis of foreign Buddhist and Confucian influences with indigenous *Shinto* elements.

D. Bruce Jameson *The Asian Origins of Japanese Performance Art* (Asia-Pacific Research Institute, 1998)

Jameson's research emphasizes cross-cultural exchanges in Japanese performance traditions,

particularly focusing on the influence of Indian and Tibetan Cham dances. His work demonstrates how these ritualistic masked performances significantly influenced the development of *Noh* and *Kyogen*.

E. Kanze Motokiyo (Zeami) *The Transmission of Style in Noh* (trans. R. J. Moore, Princeton University Press, 1984)

As a foundational figure in *Noh* theatre, Zeami's writings provide essential insights into the philosophical and aesthetic principles of masked performance. His work remains crucial for understanding the evolution from early masked performances to the refined art of *Noh* theatre.

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Glossary of Japanese Terms

1. Noh (能, のう): A form of classical Japanese musical drama that has been performed since the 14th century.

2. Kyogen (狂言, きょうげん): A form of traditional Japanese comic theater.
3. Kabuki (歌舞伎, かぶき): A classical Japanese dance-drama known for its stylized performance and elaborate make-up.
4. Nohgaku (能楽, のうがく): The collective term for Noh and Kyogen theater.
5. Nohmen (能面, のうめん): Masks used in Noh theater.
6. Gigaku (伎楽, ぎがく): An ancient masked dance-drama that preceded Noh.
7. Bugaku (舞楽, ぶがく): A type of Japanese classical dance and music.
8. Dengaku (田楽, でんがく): A type of Japanese folk dance.
9. Sarugaku (猿楽, さるがく): A form of theater that is considered a precursor to Noh.
10. Yugen (幽玄, ゆうげん): An important aesthetic concept in Japanese art, particularly in Noh, suggesting subtle profundity.
11. Shite (シテ): The main actor in a Noh play.
12. Tsure (ツレ): The accompanying actor in a Noh play.
13. Jiutai (地謡, じうたい): The chorus in a Noh play.
14. Koken (後見, こうけん): Stage attendants in Noh theater.
15. Iemoto (家元, いえもと): The head of a school of traditional Japanese art.
16. Matsuri (祭り, まつり): A Japanese festival or holiday.
17. Yokai (妖怪, ようかい): Supernatural creatures in Japanese folklore.
18. Oni (鬼, おに): Demons or ogres in Japanese folklore.
19. Tengu (天狗, てんぐ): A type of legendary creature found in Japanese folk religion.
20. Hitamen (直面, ひためん): Performing without a mask in Noh theater.

Photo source: Japan National Noh Theatre



Masked Dance Performances in Sri Lanka

A Brief Note on Similar Performances from a Few Other Regions of South Asia

LOPAMUDRA MAITRA

Abstract

The story of masked dance forms weaves an intricate set of reflections that connects the region of South Asia and the beginning of this story can be traced back a little over a thousand years. The various travels of people across the region, due to economic, political and religious reasons prepared the platform for creating a milieu of acculturation. Thus, some of the most prominent stories from folklore and oral traditions of the region of South Asia can be seen to echo in different formats across the region in the form of performing arts, especially the stories of the famous Indian epic- *The Ramayana*. The masked

dance forms of South Asia form an important part of the intangible cultural heritage and performing arts of the region; it also helps to create an important thread of interrelation and correspondence that highlights the unity amidst the miscellany. This paper looks especially into the types of masked dance performances in Sri Lanka and presents their types and concepts. The paper also briefly looks at the masked dance forms from other regions of South Asia as well-all of which represent oral traditions as well as popular culture of the respective regions.

Introduction

The narrative texts of masked dance forms weaves an intricate set of reflections that connects the region of South Asia and the beginning of this text can be traced back to a little over a thousand years. The various travels of people across the region, due to economic, political, and religious reasons prepared the platform for creating a milieu of acculturation. Thus, some of the most prominent stories from folklore and oral traditions of the region of South Asia can be seen to echo in different genres across the region in the form of performing arts, especially the stories of the famous Indian epic *Ramayana*. The masked dance forms of South Asia play an important part in the intangible cultural heritage and performing art traditions of the region. This also helps to create an important thread of interrelation and correspondence that highlights the unity amidst the miscellany.¹

It is also interesting to note that despite the waves of different religions that swept the subcontinent through the centuries, the forms of South Asian masked dances and theatres were always able to preserve their ancient core. Masked dances also connect to the principles of aesthetics and gestures as mentioned in the

Sanskrit treatise *Natyashashtra*, dating to more than 2,000 years. *Natyashashtra* has also been the mainstay of all traditional performances across the Indian subcontinent, including India and Sri Lanka. Though masked dances are a part of popular culture in present times but trace their origin as part of folk traditions and this also follows some of the conventions as mentioned in the *Natyashashtra*, including the several whirls and spins of the Sri Lankan dances.

Masked dance forms spread across South Asia mostly between the 2nd century B.C. and 8th century A.D. Cross-cultural identities got mixed with already existing regional dance forms to give rise to significant new reflections in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Tibet, Burma, etc. Through the masked dance forms- the local lores, along with the mythologies extracted from the Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* also became famous. The Purulia *Chhau* dance from India is an important example and is part of the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage from India (inscribed in 2010).

Masked dance performances of Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the masked dance form is traditionally from the western and southwestern coastal areas of the country. There are various speculations about the time of origin of these masks. M.H. Goonatilleka mentions (1995:103) “The oldest existing masks of the island of Sri Lanka cannot be more than two hundred years old...” However, he also mentions that perhaps the oldest examples did not survive as the material of the masks degenerated over time (1995:104)- this also indicates that the tradition of mask-making and their associated performances can be even older than two centuries. Thus, though the exact origin of the tradition of mask-making cannot be ascertained, but there is a possibility that it predated the colonial times of Sri Lanka

¹ After- Maitra B., Lopamudra 2018 *Masked dances of South Asia*. Newsin.Asia. July 8, 2018. <https://newsin.asia/masked-dances-of-south-asia/>

and perhaps is not only merely two hundred years old.

What do the masks denote?

A close analysis and study of the intricate details of the Sri Lankan masks speaks volumes of the reflections, representations, and expressions which are an inseparable part. It also is possible that the initial masks were simple in form and representation and became more elaborate with time. Additionally, during the colonial times of Sri Lanka, a plethora of expressions were added through masks. Traditionally, the raw materials used for making the masks are the light wood of *kaduru* (Strychnine tree/*Strychnos nux vomica*) and *rukattana* (Blackboard tree/*Alstonia scholaris*). At present, the wood of Erabadu (Indian Coral tree/*Erythrina variegata*) and Kapu pulun (Silk Cotton tree/*Ceiba pentandra*) trees are also used. However, being softwood, these decay within five decades. Thus, it can be directly related to the statement by Goonatilleke mentioned above, about the non-permanent nature of the masks. This is also the reason that none of the early examples of masks have remained till the present. However, across the 20th century, several theatre personalities helped to revitalise and adapt these traditional dance forms (especially *Kolam*) for the modern stage and mention may be made of Late Prof. E.R. Sarathchandra in the early 1950s and Prof. M.H. Goonatilleka (Dean of Department of Fine Art, University of Kelaniya, 1978-1992), who researched about the low-country dance of Sri Lanka. Prof. Goonatilleka also mentioned the art of the *kolam* dance and the mask carving to have originated in Ambalangoda by the Tukka Wadu generation many years ago. Prof. Sarathchandra conducted extensive research with reference to Mr. Tukku Wadu Gunadasa for the stage drama 'Maname'.

The broad types

Over a broad category, the Sri Lankan masks display features of religio-spiritual and cultural overtones and they are often categorised primarily into three main contexts-ritualistic, ceremonial dance, and festive occasions or professional displays. (Goonatilleke, 1995:111).

The masks can be classified as *Kolam*, *Sanni*, and *Raksha*. All three varieties are used for dancing and decorative purposes at present as these masks gradually began to lose touch with their traditional and original performances from colonial times onwards. The colonial times gradually witnessed the use of masks more as related to performances alone, taking away the spiritual, religio-cultural, and therapeutic features. Today, the *Raksha* masks are often seen in processions and festivals. The *Kolam* masks are used in staging comic plays and depicting various stories from everyday village life and enacting different characters from a village and each section, profession, and occupation is thus portrayed- including the king and the queen.

Three main types

Kolam

The official website of the Department of Fine Arts, University of Peradeniya (Sri Lanka) mentions the origin of the *kolam* drama dates back to the 15th century. The same official website also mentions an interesting folktale about the origin of the *kolam* masks and the accompanying performances. A close observation of the tale highlights a degree of respect associated with the performance as it is accorded a divine connection. According to this tale, once upon a time, there was a king and a queen. The name of the king was Raja Maha Sammatha. Once, when they were expecting a child, the queen craved a masked dance performance. Several dancers were summoned from all over the kingdom and

f far-off foreign lands, but all failed to make the queen happy. Even the royal performers failed in the effort and the queen remained sad. The king remained troubled and kept thinking about ways to mend the situation. Seeing the miserable mortal couple, God Indra (some sources mention him as God Sakra, related to Buddhism) took pity and invoked the God of creation and asked him for a solution. The God of creation made a mask and created an accompanying book of instructions. He then hid both in the royal garden of the couple. The following day, the royal gardener found the mask and the book and informed the king. The king understood that these were God-sent. He instructed the royal performers to wear the mask, follow the instructions from the book, and proceed to perform accordingly. After that, a wonderful dance took place and the queen was delighted. Finally, she was satisfied and happy. Thus, the *Kolam* masked dance became popular among mortals.

A British Museum manuscript concerning the *Kolam* lists 53 characters from regular village life. The *Kolam* performances are held generally once a year in an open courtyard and continue for seven to ten nights. It starts after dinner time and continues till the early hours of the next morning. The earliest written reference of the *Kolam* is considered to be that of John Callaway. In 1829, Callaway published 185 verses of a *Kolam* play, along with a description of the performances, some sketches of masks worn by performers, and also a brief introduction of the play. An early version of the *Kolam* text is preserved in the Colombo National Museum and is written on palm leaves. There is yet another *Kolam* manuscript in the British Museum which is inscribed in paper. The oldest printed text, edited in 1895 by A.G. Perera, is in the Colombo National Museum library.²

² <https://www.britannica.com/art/South-Asian-arts/Dance-and-theatre>

The masks of *Kolam* drama can be divided into three main categories:-

1. Masks that represent the royalties and elites, e.g. king, queen, *hewa*, *jasa*, *lenchina*, *suransina*, *arachhi*, *mudali*, *chencia*, *liyanappu*
2. Over-realistic masks include *narilatha*, *sandakinduru*, *gurulu*, *surabawalliya*, *giridevi*, *raksha*.
3. Animal masks include lion, tiger, fox, dog, and eagle.

The making process of masks follows a complex process and follows the instructions from three main prose in Sanskrit- *Shariputraya*, *Rupawaliya*, and *Maimathaya*. The processes include³-

1. Cutting the tree and processing the timber
2. Flattening
3. Removing unnecessary sections of the timber
4. Smoking it
5. Cutting it into shapes
6. Crafting the shapes and
7. Painting

The painting of the masks follows a traditional process of acquiring and practicing within families. The masks are made with natural colors, procured from the environment in earlier times. This has however changed and presently, mostly store-bought, artificial paints are used. Conventionally, the painting used to take several days, however, presently it is only a matter of a couple of days to complete painting a mask with artificial paints. Traditionally, the paints were procured from natural sources e.g. red and brown used to be available from stones, yellow from *kirigal*, white from *makulu mati*, purple from the flowers- *bovitiyaa* and *ranawara*,

³ Official website of Department of Fine Arts, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka



green from *diyalabu*, *ladappa*, *madatiya* and *kohomba* and black from burnt coconut shells. The colours follow a designation. Thus, royal or elite characters like the king, queen, or ministers are painted in orange, pale red, yellow, and white. The commoners, including villagers

Fig-1: Various processes of the making of Kolam masks⁴

from various professions, are painted in brown, grey, green, and yellow. Other characters, which require over-emphasizing, are painted in red, black, brown, and pale pink. The colours highlight various features of each character that they portray.

⁴ After official website of Department of Fine Arts, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka- <https://arts.pdn.ac.lk/afcp/kolansl.php>

Kolam Masked Dances At Present

Over the years, *Kolam* masked dances have witnessed several changes, including the inclusion of women as performers as traditionally, it was only limited to men. However, the number of performances has reduced drastically to suit contemporary themes. Often these are devoid of the traditional rhythm, verses, and drums. With reduced opportunities, the performers have also lost incentive and very few from the present generation are seen to take up the profession. The masks have survived as ornamental pieces and tourist attractions. Unfortunately, little has been given to preserve the *Kolam* performances. Some individual performing groups have tried to preserve the legacy, e.g. the museums by Ariyapala and Tukka Wadu groups

Masks Belong to Benthara Tradition - From Mr. Pathmasiri Weerasinghe's Mask Collection



Anabera Mask

Chukkiniya Mask

Appuhami mask

Mudali Mask

Nonchi Akka Mask

Police mask

Masks Belong to Ambalangoda Tradition - From Mr. L.A.R. Nandana's Mask Collection



Anabera Mask

Jasaya Mask

King Maname Mask

Queen Maname Mask

Lenchina Mask

Mudali Mask

Figure 2: Various Kolam masks from two different traditions of Sri Lanka⁵

in Ambalangoda. Unfortunately, the Mirissa (Udupila) group is on the verge of declining⁶

Sanni

The *Sanni* masks were originally associated with Devil dancing ceremonies and for the purpose of curing any illness or disease. There are 18 distinctive masks representing 18 evil spirits responsible for illnesses, e.g. the *Sanni Yakuma* masks were part of an exorcism ritual. *Sanni* (disease) are portrayed as demons by exorcists

wearing masks which are quite elaborate in their features. Occasionally though a composite mask representing all 18 diseases is represented in the *Daha Ata Sanniya* (18 diseases) as one mask, but mostly, a smaller number is used in each mask- depending on which demon is considered to be causing a person's affliction. Finally, an exorcism ends with the appearance of the chief demon- the *Maha Kola* (the terrific/all-encompassing one)- which generally incorporates miniature representations of all the other 18 demons. Though there are detailed accounts of these rituals and the beliefs associated with them, yet more studies are needed to understand the *Sanni* classifications and their representations in the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Sanni classification of disease

Demon (<i>Sanniya</i>)	Literal translation	Associated conditions
Amukku	Vomiting bouts	Vomiting and stomach diseases
Abutha	Non-spirit related	Not spirit related insanity
Butha	Spirit related	Spirit related insanity
Bihiri	Deaf	Deafness
Deva	Divine	Epidemic diseases
Gedi	Lumps	Boils and skin diseases
Gini Jala	Great fire or flame	Malaria and high fevers
Golu	Dumb	Dumbness
Gulma	Worms (especially hookworm)	Parasitic worms and stomach diseases
Jala	Water or diarrhoea	Cholera and chills
Kana	Blind	Blindness
Kora	Lame	Lameness and paralysis
Maru	Death	Delirium and death
Naga	Snake (especially cobra)	Bad dreams about snakes
Pissu	Insanity	Temporary insanity
Pith	Bilious	Bilious diseases
Slesma	Phlegm	Phlegm and epilepsy
Vatha	Wind humour or rheumatic	Flatulence and rheumatism

(Fig-3: Sanni classification of various diseases. After Bailey and de Silve, 2006:1327)

various *Sanni* masks. (Bailey and de Silva, 2006: 1327)

Speaking about the representation of the diseases, it is important to understand the classification of the masks. It is also to keep in mind that these masks were classified without any knowledge of modern science and medicine and by non-medical practitioners. The classifications followed the symptoms of the diseases and the clinical features and thus, the diseases were principally classified into two broad groups- one representing the physical manifestations of diseases and the other portraying the psychological aspect of illnesses. Specially crafted masks that symbolically embodied these physical and psychological symptoms of ill health were worn by performers. Each performance usually lasted for a night to several days. Both the categories had a different set of colours and features. Following are some of these examples (after Bailey and de Silva, 2006: 1327-1328)-

- Stomach diseases, which were associated with vomiting had a green colour and a protruding tongue
- Diseases that were considered to be associated with worms or anaemia had a pale colour.
- The masks which were considered to represent an epidemic have headgear. The possible explanation that follows is the large-scale spread of the disease was probably considered to have a divine connection. The headdress is a symbol of authority or divinity.
- The mask for boils and skin diseases has several globular protrusions on the face
- The masks which were meant for diseases that accompanied high fever, including viral fever, cholera, and malaria, have a fiery red colour.
- A special mask for high fever was marked with flames across the forehead.
- The masks for paralysis or lameness have a unilateral deformity which could also represent a cerebral stroke.
- The masks for bilious diseases, including jaundice, generally has a yellow or orange colour.
- The range of masks that represented what was considered to be related to psychiatric illnesses was often considered to be caused by demons. These also included dumbness, blindness, and deafness among others. The mask for deafness includes a cobra (which was traditionally considered to be a deaf animal in Sri Lanka) extending over the nose to cover one side and an eye of the face. The mask for dumbness has a wide-open mouth without any teeth or tongue. The mask for blindness usually has its eyes missing.



Figure 4: Gulma Sanniya (left)- demon of parasitic worms and stomach diseases Bihiri Sanniya (middle)- demon of deafness Golu Sanniya (right)- demon of dumbness



Figure 5: Gedi Sanniya (left)- demon of Boils and skin diseases Jala Sanniya (middle)- demon of cholera and chills Kora Sanniya (right)- demon of lameness and paralysis
(Both fig 4 & 5 after Bailey and de Silva, 2006: 1327-1328)

Raksha

The *Raksha* masks depict various types of demons. These masks play an important role in the dance performance of the traditional play *Kolam Maduwa*. According to popular legends, these masks were made by the ancient inhabitants of Sri Lanka, the *Rakshasas*. They are supposed to represent these masks.

Painted in vibrant colours, with protruding tongues and bulging eyes, these masks are considered to ward off evil and *rakshasha* means

‘demon’. These are used in various festivals and cultural performances. Presently, these are also sold as tokens and are a favorite amongst tourists from all over the world.

Across all categories and traditionally, the *Raksha* masks can be categorized according to characters depicted through the masks - Gods, human beings, *Rakshaya*, *Yakka*, animals, and a section of composite masks. There are also interesting oral traditions associated with these

masks. Though conventionally, there are 24 *Raksha* masks, at present only a few are popular for performances. These include-

- *Naga Raksha*- It represents a cobra that captures its enemies and makes them slaves. This is a very prominent and popular mask. This also represents a demon who can transform into a king cobra at will.
- *Gurulu Raksha*- It represents a hawk or eagle that rescues the captives from the *Nagas*. This mask is supposed to protect and bring good luck. The construction of the mask represents the mythical bird from Hindu mythology- *Garuda*, who is said to be the *vahana* or carrier of Lord *Vishnu*. *Garuda* is mentioned to have the head of a bird and the body of a human with large wings to fly and considers snakes to be his arch-enemy. This very aspect is represented through the mask as it shows the *Garuda* devouring a snake. The snake or the *Naga*, is painted above the bird's face.
- *Maru Raksha*- This represents the demon of death. This mask has glaring teeth and protruding eyes.
- *Rathnakuta Raksha*- This red mask is represented by a large snake hood on its head
- *Gara Raksha*- this mask is used in *Perahera* rituals (religious processions), in folk dramas, and also by fishermen to increase their catch. This mask is smaller in size than the others and is widely used. In folk dramas, the *Gara* mask is shown as the final performance. This mask is also used to cure illnesses and this forms a separate performance and should not be confused with folk dramas. In folk dramas, the *Gara* mask is thus described:
 - 'On the head is gem studded ornament, in the middle are three serpent hoods. The eyes are of a buffalo, the two lips are red and two white teeth protrude and it wears three snakes on the head like a crown. It is majestic in appearance and compared with a *pandol* (the flower sheath of the unopened blossom of the coconut palm). The *Gara* demon arrives quickly. The fearsome mask is green in colour, its lips are deep red and the protruding teeth point downwards.' (after *Raksha masks*, <https://in.lakpura.com/products/gara-raksha-mask>)
- *Ginidal Raksha* or *Gini Raksha*- represents the fire devil that projects anger and wards off evil. Since the mask represents the emotions of anger, it is painted with vibrant colours of red, orange, and yellow. The ears are specially patterned to ward off all evil.
- *Mayura Raksha*- These masks represent peacock that brings peace, harmony, and prosperity. The mask has three beautifully painted peacocks on the two sides and the head of the mask. The peacocks are painted with vibrant blue and yellow.
- *Dwi Naga Raksha*- twin cobra devil who brings protection from all evils and danger. It is a popular mask for performance and the snakes connect with the very ethos of Agriculture of Sri Lanka
- *Mal Gurulu Raksha*- It represents a flowery eagle that brings fame and fortune. The mask is represented by the beak, multi-colored swirls around the head, and a single snake which encircles the mouth and rises above the forehead.



Figure 6: Gara Raksha Kolam performance⁷



Figure 7: Naga Raksha Kolam performance⁸



Figure 8: Garulu Raksha performance⁹



Figure 9: Maru Raksha performance¹⁰

As the tradition of various masked dances developed

It is important to mention that Sri Lanka did not see a tradition of Sanskrit dramas which also is often considered to represent a form of a mainstream medium, mostly developed under the patronage of royalty across most parts of the Indian subcontinent. It is also often mentioned by Goonatilleka (1994:499), that theatre and drama

in Sri Lanka only developed during the colonial times and over the last few centuries under the influence of the English language. However, this seems to be a subjective analysis as it negates the existence of the expression of the common people through music, dance, and performances which broadly fall within the categories of folk performances. Goonatilleka himself proceeded to mention the prevalence of a system of ritual dance in Sri Lanka from very ancient times, which was associated with the very essence of the common masses.

Goonatilleka speaks about these performances as “rudimentary impersonation as the costume

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

and dialogue in *Thovil* (devil dancing), a parade of characters who “walk” or dance in *Kolam* (masked dance), or simple comedy in *Sokari* (ritual dance drama with mime and song). In the same paragraph, to further explain the presentation pattern of *Kolam*, Goonatilleke says, “*Kolam* is pure masked mimic entertainment, rather like medieval estates satire, based on the appearance, costume, and weaknesses of certain professions and officials; it is not at all exorcist or ritualistic (though bears and lions appear too, just for mimicry). (499:1994). While *Thovil* is an “exorcism ceremony wherein the devils of disease and Maha Sona (Death, the Grave) are summoned, appeased by offerings, and dismissed” and *sokari*, “though comic, has deep ritual roots.” (499:1994).

Following the comprehensive research work by Dr. Sarathchandra, one gets to know about the ritualistic dances and plays existing as part of the common masses from a time, much prior to the colonial times of the country. These were performances to ward off diseases and evil spirits and to invoke the help of gods in times of crisis. Edmund Peiris advocates the existence of folk plays from very ancient times which are the ‘*kolam natima*’ or masked play. Peiris mentions that this presented “an array of masked dancers, representing characters drawn from various sources and not connected with any particular story, and ended with the enactment of a story or two in the form of a play, through the medium of song and spoken language, the latter being for the most part, impromptu. The dancers did not themselves sing; they merely depicted the movements while the singing was done by different people. (Folk Play, p. 52). At a much later stage, probably under the influence of the *nádagam*, some characters in the play seem to have spoken or sung their parts, putting aside their masks.” (1974:28-29). This helps one to ascertain the antiquity of the masked performances in Sri Lanka.

However, it is also to be noted that in Sri Lanka, there are no masks depicting the Buddha or the Bodhisattva, however, specific stories from the Jatakas are often narrated and these seems to be a recent incorporation, especially within the colonial period. Though this perspective needs more clarity and research, one perspective can be found in the words of Edmund Peiris Theravada Buddhism kept a distance from performing arts. This is also quite the opposite from the several neighboring regions where Buddhism flourished under royal patronage. Peiris after observing this, “In India Buddhist drama flourished for a while under the patronage of Buddhism. Even in the two Theravâda countries, Burma and Siam, well-developed drama was in vogue in the royal courts, (Folk Drama, pp. 8,18,19). But not in Lanka, where poetry and drama were relegated to the class of “despicable arts” even in a public document, like the *Dambadeni Katikâvata* of King Parakrama Bahu II (1234-1269 BCE). It says that Buddhist monks should not study such despicable arts, like poetry and drama, nor teach them to others, (*Dambadeni Katikâvata*, p. 15). Of course, this was an injunction on the monks, and inspired by ascetical rigidity; but it served also as a damper on the literati, who might have ventured on poetic and dramatic compositions, with the result that for two centuries or more after the *Kavsilumina* of Parakramabahu II no poetical work s of note appeared” (Siñhaia Sâhitiya Nâgîma, p. 72).” (Edmund Peiris, 1974:29-30).

Thus, folk play did not develop into mainstream drama, in spite of the many Jataka stories and the widespread influence of Buddhism across the country. However, many aspects of folk drama gradually changed during the last few centuries and over the colonial period. Many narrative were incorporated within mainstream drama and many aspects of folk theatre found a new platform of expression. The masked dance performances too, found several new conduits of communication. Further

changes took place especially in the post-colonial period and across the last several decades, when masked dance performances gradually started to be associated more as a mere visual art, rather than a performing art as the lack of incentive saw the loss of many performers from the younger generation take up different professions, other than the professions of the family.

Thus, presently, the masks of the performances form an important part of souvenirs and tokens for tourists. The mask-making workshops often serve as significant tourist destinations for many tourists who are eager to understand the processes which go behind the making of the vibrant and colourful tokens, which brighten up the shelves of almost all souvenir shops in Sri Lanka. At times, the masked dances are also part of tourist attractions and are part of performances at gatherings, seminars or conferences, where a multitude of foreign delegates are present. The swift movements of the performances, accompanying the drumbeats leave the spectators mesmerised. Albeit a dying art, the masked dance performances need more financial stability for continuation and preservation for posterity.

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Mask Dance in Bhutan

Unveiling Reality Through Masked Kaleidoscope

TIATEMSU LONGKUMER

Abstract

Mask dance, or “cham,” is a vital aspect of Bhutanese culture, deeply rooted in Buddhism and community. This tradition, which dates back to the 8th century, is an essential part of Bhutanese festivals and is performed by both monks and laypeople. The masks worn during these dances are believed to embody the spirit of the deity and protect the performers from evil spirits. The performances are not only a way to honor deities but also to purify the mind and cultivate inner peace. This paper will explore the history, significance, and cultural impact of mask dance in Bhutan, highlighting its role in preserving cultural knowledge and traditions, bringing communities together, and providing a unique spiritual experience for both performers and audience members.



Collection of Bhutanese Cham masks at Ogyen Choling Museum.
Photo courtesy: Ogyen Choling Museum

Introduction

The captivating Cham mask dances, an integral part of Bhutanese cultural heritage, trace their roots to the ritual dances of Indian Buddhist *tantra*, potentially incorporating elements from the animistic Bon religion and masked dances performed in early Tibetan courts (Nagasawa, 2016). While pinpointing the path of Cham from Tibet to Bhutan remains elusive due to limited historical documentation, several narratives provide insights into its arrival.

One widely held belief is that Guru Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche, introduced 'ham' to Bhutan in the 8th century during his time, he put efforts to propagate Buddhism in the region. According to traditional accounts, some masked dances arrived with Padmasambhava as he sought to subdue the powerful spirit Shelging Karpo at Kurje in Bumthang. The Guru is also said to have

performed the Phurpai Dungcham, the dance of ritual daggers, in Tibet to sanctify the site for the construction of Samye Monastery. This suggests a link between early Cham traditions and the establishment of Buddhism in both Tibet and Bhutan.

Another significant figure in the transmission of Cham is the *terton* (treasure revealer) Pema Lingpa (1450-1521). He is credited with introducing several mask dances, including the Peling Tercham, based on his visionary experiences and the teachings embedded in a tradition called 'terma'. This highlights the role of revealed treasures and visionary experiences in shaping and disseminating 'cham' practices in Bhutan.

Further suggesting a Tibetan influence, the Drametse Ngacham, a unique Bhutanese mask dance, is said to have originated from the visions of Khedrup Kunga Gyaltsen in the 16th

century. He is believed to have been guided by Dakinis to the abode of Guru Rinpoche, where he witnessed celestial beings performing this dance (Gyatso, 2009). This narrative strengthens the connection between Tibetan Buddhism, visionary experiences, and the development of Cham in Bhutan.

These dances are performed primarily to manifest tutelary deities and their entourages for those enlightened enough to see them in reality, embodying the spiritual power believed to purge negative karma and bestow blessings upon witnesses. More than mere entertainment, Cham is deeply embedded in the spiritual and social fabric of Tibetan and Bhutanese societies. The dances are performed in various contexts, ranging from large-scale monastic festivals (*tshechu*) to smaller village rituals, and even as part of state ceremonies.

The Philosophy of Cham

Central to the philosophy of Cham is the concept of the *mandala*. As described by Aris (1980), the dance itself becomes a “mandala of action,” a dynamic representation of the sacred, cosmologically ordered space usually depicted in static form through paintings or sand mandalas. This embodiment of the mandala through movement transcends the limitations of visual representation, allowing for an active engagement with the sacred space and the deities it represents. The courtyard where the Cham takes place is carefully delineated, often with chalk, to mark the boundaries of this sacred space, further emphasizing its mandalic nature (Schrempf, 1994).

The act of dancing in a circular motion within the mandala, accompanied by specific steps, gestures (*mudras*), and the use of ritual implements like the *phurba* (ritual dagger) and *bandha* (skull cup), becomes a potent act of transformation (Schrempf, 1994). The dancers, embodying wrathful protectors or Black hat

tantrists, actively engage in “subduing the earth” - a process that not only purifies the ground but also extends to an inner subjugation of obstacles hindering enlightenment (Schrempf, 1994). These obstacles, represented by the term *barche*, encompass a wide range of challenges, both internal and external, that hinder spiritual progress (Epstein, 1977). Through the powerful movements of the Cham, these obstacles are symbolically confronted, transformed, and ultimately transcended.

Cham embraces a seemingly paradoxical notion- the use of violence as a means of liberation. The imagery often associated with Cham, particularly the wrathful deities depicted through masks and costumes, can appear unsettling to those unfamiliar with Tibetan Buddhism. However, this fierce imagery serves a specific purpose. It is not meant to glorify violence, but rather to represent the power of compassion and wisdom in confronting and ultimately overcoming the forces of ignorance and negativity (Schrempf, 1994). The destruction of the *linga* (an effigy often shaped like a human body), a central act in many Cham performances, symbolizes the dismantling of the ego and the liberation from self-clinging.

The historical development of Cham is closely intertwined with the interplay of power, both spiritual and secular. Its connection with state power in Tibet, particularly through the *gutor cham* performed as part of the annual state ritual cycle, highlights its role in legitimizing and reinforcing authority (Richardson, 1994). However, the contemporary performance of Cham extends beyond these traditional contexts, finding expression in various public spaces, both within and outside Tibetan communities. This raises critical questions about the shifting meanings and uses of Cham in a globalized world, and the ongoing negotiation of identity and cultural representation in the face of changing socio-political landscapes (Schrempf, 2000).

Types of Mask Dance in Bhutan

Mask dances in Bhutan are classified into three main categories: dramatic dances that promote moral values, dances that protect individuals from harmful spirits, and dances that celebrate victories.

Drametse Nga Cham, also called the drum dance of Drametse, is a traditional Bhutanese mask dance originating from the village of Drametse in Bhutan's Mongar district. The dance holds deep cultural and spiritual significance and is believed to have originated from the teachings of the renowned 16th-century religious master, Tertön Pema. The Drametse Nga Cham features elaborate choreography performed by masked dancers who embody various deities and animals,



Drametse Nga Cham performance of Bhutan.
Photo Courtesy: UNESCO

including the twelve animals of the Bhutanese horoscope. This dance aims to challenge the perception of enlightenment being limited to human or celestial forms (Phuntsho, 2017a).

Today, the dance has spread to numerous religious and state festivals across Bhutan. Recognized for its cultural importance, the Drametse Nga Cham was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2005.

The Shawa-Shachi, also known as *Acho Pento*, is a Bhutanese semi-operatic dance-drama performed during festivals. The performance entertains while conveying Buddhist teachings of non-violence. The two-day performance depicts the story of Gyonpo Dorjé, a hunter called Acho, and his servant Pento, who encounter a stag protected by the revered saint Milarepa.

The dance involves elaborate costumes and masks, with Acho, the hounds, and the stag distinguished by their attire. The performance is punctuated by humorous interactions between Acho and Pento, and the clowns' satirical portrayal of religious rituals provides comic relief. The drama culminates in a powerful message of redemption as Milarepa's spiritual intervention leads Acho to renounce hunting and embrace a spiritual path (Phuntsho, 2017b).

The Boar Dance, known as Phag Cham, is a significant mask dance performed during the Tamzhing Phala Choepa festival in Bumthang, Bhutan. This sacred dance, where performers wear boar masks, dates back to the 15th century. It was composed by the renowned *Tertön* (treasure revealer) Rigzin Pema Lingpa while he was searching for a suitable location to build a monastery. According to legend, Pema Lingpa had a vision in which Yidam Dorji Phagmo, also known as Vajravarahi, the boar-headed deity, performed the dance and instructed him to learn and perform it during the consecration ceremony of the monastery.



The servant Acho Pento, the hunter Gonpo Dorje and other atsara, the dance of Milarepa (Sha ba sha khyi 'cham), Paro Tshechu (tshes bcu), dance arena, Paro Tshechu (tshes bcu), 2nd day.
Photo Courtesy: Françoise Pommaret, 1981

Upon waking, Pema Lingpa remembered the steps of the dance, wrote them down, and taught them to his followers. This dance, performed to ward off evil spirits, please higher beings and spirits, and bring peace and happiness to the people, became the first in a series of mask dances at the monastery's consecration ceremony. The Phag Cham remains a central feature of the annual Tamzhing Phala Choepa festival held in the 8th lunar month. The foundation of the Tamzhing Lhakhang (temple) is also said to have been dug by a boar, symbolizing the deep connection between the boar and the monastery's history. The dance continues to be performed, celebrating the spiritual legacy of Pema Lingpa and the visionary origins of the Tamzhing Lhündrup Monastery (Chophel, 2018).

The Druk Wangyel Tshechu, held annually on December 13th, is a vibrant festival that

not only celebrates Bhutanese culture but also commemorates significant national historical events. This festival was inaugurated in 2011 and takes place at the Dochula Pass, nestled amidst the snow-capped peaks of the Jigme Singye Wangchuck mountain range. The venue for the Druk Wangyel Tshechu is particularly noteworthy as it features two modern Bhutanese monuments: the 108 Druk Wangyel Chortens and the Druk Wangyel Lhakhang. The Druk Wangyel Tshechu also holds military significance, marking the commencement of a military expedition in 2003 aimed at securing Bhutan's borders.

One of the notable masked performances during this Tsechu is presented by the Royal Bhutan Army. The dance is divided into two segments. The first portrays the departure of warriors, with dancers donning red masks



Druk Wangyel Tsechu performance of Bhutan.
Photo Courtesy: Bhutan Mindful Travels.



Druk Wangyel Tsechu performance of Bhutan.
Photo Courtesy: Daily Bhutan, 2023

to symbolize the apprehension and tension associated with military campaigns. Their rhythmic movements depict soldiers marching to battle. The second segment illustrates the warriors' triumphant return. In this part, dancers wear white masks to represent the elation and tranquillity that follow successful military operations, where enemies are vanquished and troops return unharmed. This portion is characterized by sprightly, jubilant, and festive choreography.

Delineating the Significance of Mask Dance

Living Narratives: Cham as Repositories of Bhutanese Cultural Memory

Cham dances are integral to Bhutanese festivals and religious life, serving as vibrant repositories of cultural knowledge and traditions. These dances function as living narratives that transmit and preserve Bhutanese cultural memory across generations. Woven into their elaborate choreographies, detailed costumes, and fearsome masks are stories, teachings, and historical events that define the Bhutanese identity.

One of the primary roles of Cham is to communicate the tenets of Bhutanese Buddhism, a rich tradition rooted in *Vajrayana* teachings. These teachings emphasize personal transformation and liberation through experiential practice, finding powerful expression in the visual language of cham. By witnessing these performances, audiences are not only entertained but also subtly educated on the importance of living a virtuous life.

Beyond conveying abstract concepts, Cham recounts the lives and deeds of revered Buddhist figures, offering tangible examples of spiritual attainment. These dances also serve as embodied records of Bhutanese history, preserving the memory of significant events and

cultural milestones. Often featuring dramatic reenactments of battles, historical figures, and important rituals; Cham connects the present with the past, fostering a sense of national identity and cultural continuity.

Cham dances also reflect local histories and traditions, offering unique insights into the cultural diversity of Bhutan. Dances associated with specific villages or regions often depict local deities, myths, and legends, showcasing the rich tapestry of Bhutanese culture. These localized dances passed down through generations, act as guardians of cultural memory, ensuring the continuity of unique traditions and beliefs.



Cham Yama face mask worn in the Tshechu–Cham Dance (Museum of Cultural Masks)

The Power of Multi-Sensory Engagement

Cham dances utilize a powerful multi-sensory language, employing sight, sound, and movement to transmit cultural knowledge and traditions. The elaborate costumes, with their vibrant colours and intricate designs, capture the eye, while the rhythmic beating of drums, the resonant sounds of longhorns, and the chanting



Collection of Bhutanese Cham masks at Ogyen Choling Museum.
Photo courtesy: Jim Block

of monks create a sonic landscape that resonates deeply within the soul (Wulff, 2019).

The masks, a defining feature of Cham, are particularly potent symbols. Often carved from wood and painted in vibrant colours, they represent a vast pantheon of deities, demons, animals, and historical figures, each with its own unique story and significance (Pommaret, 2015). These masks, believed to be possessed by spirits before being worn, add a layer of mystery and power to the performances, transforming the dancers into embodiments of the divine.

Weaving Threads of Unity: Cham as a Catalyst for Communal Harmony in Bhutan

Bhutanese mask dances possess a remarkable social power – they weave threads of unity, binding communities together and fostering a profound sense of belonging. These dances transcend verbal communication, creating a shared experience that bridges social divides and reinforces collective identity.



Shazam Cham- Dance of the Deer-Bhutan.
Photo courtesy: Catherine King

The annual Tsechu festivals, where Cham dances take centre stage, are prime examples of this unifying power. These festivals, held in *dzongs* (fortresses) and monasteries across Bhutan, draw crowds from neighbouring villages and communities, transforming them into vibrant hubs of social interaction and cultural exchange.

Beyond fostering a sense of togetherness, Cham dances also play a role in reinforcing social norms and values. By depicting stories of gods, demons, heroes, and ordinary people, these dances subtly educate audiences on ethical conduct, social responsibility, and the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships within the community.

Experiencing the Divine: Cham as a Gateway to the Sacred in Bhutan

For the cham dancers, the journey begins long before they step onto the dance floor. They undergo rigorous training, often spending months in seclusion, meditating, practising, and purifying themselves (Wulff, 2019). This intensive preparation is not simply about mastering choreography; it's about cultivating a state of mind conducive to channelising the energy and spirit of the deities they are to embody.

The donning of the mask is a transformative moment. As the dancer places the mask upon their face, they shed their individual identity, stepping into the role of the deity and becoming a conduit for its power. During the performance,



Group of monks watching the Cham performance.
Photo courtesy: Institut of Language and Cultural Studies, Bhutan

the dancer enters a state of deep concentration and meditative focus. Every movement, gesture, rhythmic step is infused with intention, reflecting the specific attributes and qualities of the deity.

For the audience members, the experience of watching Cham is equally immersive and transformative. The vibrant colours of the costumes, the pulsating rhythms of the drums and longhorns, the resonant chanting of monks, and the dramatic narratives of the dances create a multi-sensory feast that transports viewers to a realm beyond the ordinary (Wulff, 2019).

The Bhutanese believe that witnessing Cham is not merely an act of passive observation; it is an active participation in a sacred ritual. The dances are believed to generate powerful blessings, purify the soul, ward off evil, and accumulate merit, offering a path to liberation for those who engage with an open heart and a receptive mind.

Facing the Winds of Change: Preserving Cham's Legacy in a Modernizing Bhutan

Despite their enduring spiritual and cultural significance, Bhutanese mask dances face significant challenges as Bhutan navigates the complexities of modernization, globalization, and the rise of tourism. Preserving the authenticity and vitality of Cham for future generations requires a delicate balancing act.

One of the most pressing challenges is the dwindling number of practitioners, particularly those deeply versed in the intricate knowledge and skills required to perform cham authentically. As younger generations increasingly pursue modern education and career paths, the traditional apprenticeship system is gradually eroding (Suntikul, 2017). This trend creates a gap in knowledge transmission, leaving fewer individuals capable of carrying forward the full depth and complexity of these dances.

The lack of systematic training further exacerbates this challenge. While some monasteries and cultural institutions offer Cham training, these programs often lack resources, structured curricula, and qualified instructors. Consequently, the quality and depth of training vary widely, impacting the overall skill level and understanding among aspiring dancers.

Bhutan's burgeoning tourism industry, while providing economic benefits and raising global awareness of its unique cultural heritage, also presents significant challenges to the preservation of Cham. The influx of tourists eager to witness these spectacular performances has led to increased pressure to commercialize and stage dances for entertainment rather than spiritual purposes (Suntikul, 2017).

This shift in focus can lead to a simplification of dances, a reduction in their spiritual depth, and a modification of costumes and masks to cater to tourist expectations. Some organizers may choose to shorten performances, omit complex ritual elements, or alter traditional costumes to make them more visually appealing to tourists. This trend risks diluting the authenticity and spiritual significance of Cham, transforming it into a mere spectacle for consumption.

Furthermore, the presence of large crowds of tourists at festivals and ceremonies can disrupt the sacred atmosphere and distract both performers and local audiences from their spiritual engagement (Suntikul, 2017). The focus shifts from experiencing the divine to capturing the perfect photograph or video, creating a disconnect between the dance and its intended purpose.

Modernization and the pervasive influence of popular culture present additional challenges. Younger generations, exposed to a constant stream of global media and entertainment, often find traditional practices like Cham less appealing compared to contemporary forms of entertainment. This shifting preference can lead

to a decline in interest and participation among younger Bhutanese, further threatening the continuity of these traditions.

Despite these challenges, Bhutan is actively engaged in efforts to preserve and promote its mask dances, recognizing their vital role in maintaining its unique cultural identity. Royal patronage, the Royal Academy of Performing Arts, community initiatives, and collaborations with international organizations are all contributing to these preservation efforts (Suntikul, 2017).

The future of Bhutanese mask dance lies in finding a balance between preserving its

traditional essence and adapting it to the changing needs and realities of a modernizing world. This requires embracing innovation while remaining faithful to the core values and spiritual significance of Cham.

By incorporating contemporary elements, engaging diverse audiences, and utilizing technology to promote and document these dances, Bhutan can ensure that Cham remains a vibrant and relevant part of its cultural landscape. However, this must be done with sensitivity, ensuring that the sacred nature of these dances is respected and their authenticity is not compromised. The ultimate goal is



A sacred site to both Bhutanese and Tibetans, the Ogyen Choling Palace Museum resonates much about Bhutan's history, culture, and traditions. The complex has numerous ancient artifacts, relics, and paintings works that depict how life was back then. Ogyen Choling Palace Museum has now been converted into a heritage house to offer the most aesthetic experience to the visitors.

Photo Courtesy: Rinchenling Resort

to create a sustainable future for Cham, where its spiritual depth, artistic beauty, and unifying power continue to inspire and enrich generations to come.

Conclusion: The Living Spirit of Cham

Bhutanese mask dance, or Cham, is more than just a spectacle; it is the living embodiment of Bhutanese culture and spirituality. Through vibrant dances, intricate masks, and sacred rituals, Cham transmits Buddhist teachings, historical narratives, and communal values across generations. Yet this vibrant tradition faces challenges from modernization and globalization. Preserving its authenticity requires nurturing skilled practitioners, supporting cultural institutions, and fostering appreciation among younger generations. Balancing tradition with innovation will ensure that Cham continues to flourish, captivating hearts and illuminating the path toward enlightenment for generations to come.

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Tracing the Cultural Significance and Historicity of Mask Dance in Nepal

BHUMIKA SINGH

Abstract

Mask dance is a centuries-old tradition deeply rooted in the cultural thread of Nepal. This art form is a testament to this region's rich heritage and spiritual beliefs. This research paper investigates the historicity and profound cultural significance of mask dance cultivated in Nepal. Drawing from a plethora of ethnographic sources, historical accounts, and field observations by eminent scholars, this research examines the ceremonial practices, symbolic motifs, and socio-cultural contexts surrounding the performative and aesthetic aspects. The historical trajectory of the mask dance unveils its role as a dynamic expression of religious devotion, cultural identity, and artistic innovation. From its origins in ancient shamanic rites to its assimilation into Buddhist

and Bon religious ceremonies, the mask dance has traversed through epochs, embodying the collective consciousness of communities across Nepal. Through an interdisciplinary lens, this paper outlines how the mask dance serves as a conduit for storytelling, myth-making, and spiritual communion, fostering a sense of collective belonging and ancestral continuity. Furthermore, this research examines the enduring legacy of the mask dance amidst contemporary socio-political transformations and globalising forces. This paper underscores its important role in preserving cultural diversity and fostering intercultural dialogue by examining the revivalist and conservationist efforts, adaptive strategies, and UNESCO's recognition of the mask dance as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. In conclusion, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of the mask dance as more than a mere performance art but as a living tradition encapsulating the resilience, creativity, and spirituality of the people of Nepal.

Introduction

Situated in the range of the Himalayas, Nepal is a cultural field with a profound history of art, ritual forms and traditions. Among its diverse cultural expressions is a centuries-old craft form used for performance that stands out as a vibrant tradition that weaves together mythology, art practices, and social values. Masked dances are an essential part of Nepal's rich cultural heritage, known for its intricate choreography and elaborate nuances on the masks. It is deeply intertwined with Nepalese communities' spiritual and social fabric. This research paper delves into the historicity and cultural significance of the mask dance in Nepal, outlining its origins, evolution, and enduring legacy passed down from generation. Drawing from ethnographic sources, historical accounts, and field observations by eminent scholars, the paper provides an interdisciplinary perspective on the mask dance's ritualistic practices, symbolic

motifs, and socio-cultural contexts. According to Toffin (2007), collective participation in these masked performances fosters a sense of belonging and unity among communities. The mask dances serve as a platform for expressing communal values, resolving conflicts, and reinforcing social hierarchies and relationships.

In several regions of Nepal, masks are mostly used in processions and rituals rather than theatrical performances. However, it is vaguely suggested that during the medieval period, theatrical performances were commonly organised in Nepal. In the fourteenth century, theatrical performance was held at the courts of the Malla kings, after the birth of a royal child. King Siddhi Narasimha Malla (1620-61), the first king of Patan, started the *Kartika* dance drama depicting events and incidents from the epic of Ramayana. Along these lines, today the most popular theatrical performance, the *Ramlila* of Ramnagar in North India is still an ongoing tradition and the masks used in the *Ramlila* of Ramnagar years ago have been preserved at the Craft Museum in Delhi, symbolic of the mythologies brought to life through these mask traditions.

Currently, at certain festivals, inhabitants of Kathmandu valley hold popular theatrical performances. In certain areas of Nepal, Tibetan culture is practised as it can be seen that the masks are worn by certain dance performers, known as the *Cham* dance performances. The word *Cham* or *Chham* is a Tibetan word which stands for dance or jump. A similar dance form used to be known in the West as 'devil dances', performed by monks wearing masks in the open spaces around the monasteries. These dances instruct the faithful concerning the deities the souls will meet after their bodily death in the *Bardo*, the intermediate state before their next re-birth. In the words of Victor Turner (1982), these rituals were integral to the spiritual life of the community, serving as a means to heal the sick, ward off evil spirits, and ensure agricultural



Figure 1: Vajrapani, a protector of the Buddha Dharma, terrifies the enemies with the dreadful expression of anger (Anne Vergati, 2009)

fertility. The origins of mask dance in Nepal can be traced back to ancient shamanic rites. These early practices were primarily centred around animistic beliefs, where shamans donned masks to communicate with spirits and deities. The anthropological studies conducted by Alan Macfarlane reveal that these shamanic practices were prevalent among indigenous groups such as the Tamang and Gurung, who used mask dances to invoke ancestral spirits and seek their guidance (Macfarlane, 1976).

Origins and Evolution

In Newari, similar to that in ancient Greek, the word for mask (*khvāhpāh*), comes from face, which means Newari face (Newari *khvāh*). Unlike the conventional understanding of masks, the etymology associated with the Newari word for mask does not convey the idea of hiding or manipulating reality. The masks in Nepal's Kathmandu region seem to reveal the quintessence of the character that is embodied by the performers, as it coincides with the identity of the performer. Perhaps, two significantly different conceptual representations are at work

in these words. With the advent of Buddhism and the Indigenous Bon religion, the mask dance underwent significant transformations. The integration of these religious philosophies introduced new symbolic motifs and ritualistic elements. Mask dances became an integral part of religious ceremonies, particularly in Tibetan Buddhism, where they are known as *Cham* dances. These performances, often held during festivals, depict stories from Buddhist mythology and teachings (Samuel, 1993).

Before the conquest of the Newar kingdom by the Gorkha kingdom in 1768, the term 'Newar' broadly referred to all inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, then known as Nepal. The Newars have a shared language and an indigenous written history that extends back to the fifth century C.E. Their contributions to art and architecture, particularly in the creation of temples, palaces, and statues, are renowned worldwide. A unique aspect of Newar civilization is the coexistence of Buddhism and Hinduism, though this coexistence has not always been without conflict. Nepal, historically a Hindu kingdom, has seen Hinduism as its dominant religion. However, Newar kings and priests also revered Buddhist deities such as Red *Avalokitesvara* (also known as *Matsyendranath*), *Harasiddhi*, and *Vajrayogini*. This blending of religious traditions is evident in the rituals, iconography and masks of the valley.

When examining the mask traditions of Nepal, particularly those of the Newar and other ethnic groups like the *Magar*, *Tharu*, and *Rai*, it is essential to distinguish between the different cultural contexts. Masks from these tribes are often considered primitive, typically crafted from wood and are mostly human-sized. Their origins and functions are largely unknown, with many now housed in museums or private collections. These traditional masks have historically been differentiated from classical Hindu art, much like how demi gods were distinguished from the

deities of the Hindu pantheon. Newar masks, in contrast, are considered classical. They depict Hindu and Buddhist gods according to traditional Indian iconographic standards but have distinctive features that set them apart from Tibetan Buddhist masks. The Newar masks are integral to the secretive, ritualistic dance dramas performed by Newar priests, known as “*Vajracarya*”, within the Tantric sanctuaries of monasteries. John Emigh, a prominent scholar of performance traditions, notes that these masked rituals are deeply embedded in the cultural and religious fabric of the Newar community, serving as a medium through which spiritual and communal identities are expressed and reinforced.

One of the most significant Newar deities is Red *Avalokitesvara*, worshipped in Patan under various names. For Buddhists, he is Karunamaya, and for Hindus, he is *Matsyendranath*. His local name, *Bunga Dyo*, refers to the locality where his statue resides for half of the year. The iconography of Red *Avalokitesvara*, often compared to the *Krsna Jagannath* in Puri, Orissa, is atypical for a bodhisattva, reflecting his status as a ‘folk’ God. His statue in Patan undergoes annual consecration, where it is plastered with clay and ritually bathed, much like the *Nava Durga* masks used in various ceremonies. As noted by Indian art historian Stella Kramrisch, these rituals serve to renew and reinvigorate the sacred power of the deity, reaffirming the community’s connection to its spiritual heritage.

The Newar mask tradition is not only an art form but also a vital element of cultural identity and spiritual practice. Despite the rich literature on Newar rituals, much of what is known about their mask dances, particularly those involving the *Nava Durga* or the demon dance (*Lakhey*), comes from oral traditions. The secrecy surrounding these rituals adds to their mystique, preserving a living connection to the valley’s ancient past.

Symbolic Motifs and Ritualistic Practices

Cataloguing each mask is a formidable endeavour in itself. Nonetheless, here are the most prominent masks, along with the cultural significance attributed to each. These masks represent deities or demons and serve as repositories of stories, narratives, and the voices of beliefs from Nepal that have preserved the essence of these traditions.

First, the God masks (*Dev-Mukha*) in Nepal represent Hindu deities such as *Vishnu*, *Shiva*, and *Bhairava* (Fig. 2). These masks invoke the presence and blessings of the divine during rituals and festivals. For example, the *Bhairava* mask is often used in the *Bhairav* Dance, symbolising Shiva’s fierce and protective nature in his *Bhairava* form. This mask is integral to rituals that seek protection and the destruction of evil forces. In dances, these masks symbolise the divine power that is believed to protect the community. For instance, in the *Bhairav* Dance, the performer wearing the *Bhairava* mask enacts the triumph of good over evil, reinforcing cultural values and the importance of divine intervention in people’s lives.

Second, the Demon masks (*Rakshasa-Mukha*), depict various *rakshasas*, or evil spirits, from Hindu mythology. These masks are used in exorcism rituals and dances to ward off negative influences. The terrifying appearance of these masks, often featuring sharp teeth and bulging eyes, is designed to scare away evil spirits. In dances such as the *Lakhey* dance, the *rakshasa* mask represents the demon *Lakhey*, who is paradoxically seen as a protector of the city, warding off other malevolent spirits. The dance, performed with vigorous and aggressive movements, reinforces the community’s belief in the need to confront and expel evil to maintain harmony (Fig. 3).

Thirdly, the Animal masks (*Pashu-Mukha*), are integral elements of the country’s cultural and



Figure 2: The Head of Bhairava, Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, 16th century.



Figure 3: Lakhey Mask Dance of the Newari Communities from Kathmandu Valley, Nepal (August 2022).

religious traditions, particularly within the context of dance and ritual (Fig. 4). These masks are not merely decorative objects but are imbued with deep symbolic meanings that connect the human world to the animal kingdom and the divine. In Nepalese rituals, animal masks represent various creatures, such as lions, tigers, and elephants, each embodying virtues like strength, courage, and wisdom. These attributes are drawn from Hindu and Buddhist mythology, where animals often play pivotal roles as embodiments of deities or as symbols of cosmic forces. These dances are not just performances but are seen as living rituals that preserve and transmit cultural values and religious beliefs across generations.



Figure 4: Hanuman Mask of Nepal (31 July, 2024).

For instance, during the *Indra Jatra* festival in Kathmandu, dancers wear masks of lions and tigers to honour the deities and protect the community (Fig. 5). The animal masks serve as conduits through which the divine can interact with the physical world, and the dancers, by wearing these masks, become temporary vessels for these spiritual entities. One of the key aspects of these dances is their connection to the agricultural calendar. Festivals like *Ghanta Karna* or *Gai Jatra* involve processions where animal masks are worn to invoke the blessings of nature, ensuring a bountiful harvest and protection from natural calamities.

Fourth are the Buddhist masks that depict various deities, bodhisattvas, and protector spirits from the Buddhist pantheon. These masks are integral to religious ceremonies and dances, such as the *Cham* dance (Fig. 6), which is performed in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries celebrating the conquest of *Padmasambhava* over the indigenous cult and their deities. The *Cham* masks are often elaborate and highly symbolic, representing different aspects of Buddhist teachings and the spiritual forces that



Figure 5: Nepalese masked dancers, known as *Pulu Kisi* (White elephant), performed during the *Indra Jatra* festival in Kathmandu, Nepal (September 11, 2019).

protect and guide practitioners. Buddhist mask dances, like the *Cham* dance, are performed to purify the environment, ward off evil spirits, and bring blessings to the community. The use of these masks in the dance symbolizes the active presence of these spiritual beings in the world, protecting and guiding the faithful. The dances also serve as a form of visual teaching, illustrating Buddhist concepts in a way that is accessible to all. In Nepal, this dance tradition is *Mani Rimdu*, a spectacular and colourful masked dance performed during different religious festivals.

Fifth are the folk masks used in local festivals and celebrations, representing characters from folk stories and rural life. These masks are less formal than the god or demon masks, often reflecting the everyday lives and beliefs of the local people. They are used to depict heroes, villains, and common folk, bringing to life the stories that form the backbone of local culture. Folk mask dances, such as those performed in the Terai region during the *Sakhwa* dance, connect the community to its roots. These dances often tell stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, with the masks serving to illustrate the characters in these epic tales. The use of these masks in dance emphasizes the continuity of tradition and the importance of storytelling in preserving cultural identity.



Figure 6: Cham mask dance, showcasing the cultural heritage of the Himalayas (December 2014).

Therefore, every mask used in these masked dances is rich in symbolism. Each mask represents a particular deity, spirit, or mythological figure, and the dance movements are designed to invoke the qualities and powers of these entities. For instance, the fierce masks of wrathful deities are believed to ward off negative forces, while the serene masks of compassionate deities symbolise blessings and protection (Fisher, 1997).

The ritualistic context of the mask dance is equally significant. These dances are performed during major religious festivals and rites of passage, such as the Tibetan New Year (*Losar*) and the *Mani Rimdu* festival. The performance is often accompanied by traditional music and chants, enhancing the spiritual atmosphere. Field observations by scholars like René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz provide detailed descriptions of these elaborate performances, highlighting their role in community cohesion and spiritual expression (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1976).

Socio-Cultural Context, Community Identity and Contemporary Relevance

The mask dance serves as a powerful medium for storytelling and myth-making. Through these performances, ancient myths and historical events are brought to life, transmitting cultural knowledge and values to successive generations. This aspect of the dance fosters a sense of collective identity and continuity, as noted by anthropologist Mary Des Chene (Des Chene, 1991). The narratives often depict the triumph of good over evil, the journey of souls in the afterlife, and the importance of moral and ethical conduct, thereby reinforcing societal norms and beliefs (Ortner, 1978). In addition to its religious and cultural functions, the mask dance also reflects the socio-political dynamics of Nepalese society. During periods of political upheaval, these performances have served as a form of resistance and resilience. For example, during the Maoist insurgency in

Nepal, traditional cultural practices, including mask dances, were revived as symbols of ethnic identity and solidarity (Hutt, 2004). Research by Sarah LeVine and David N. Gellner illustrates how these performances became a means of asserting cultural heritage and resisting cultural homogenization imposed by central authorities (LeVine & Gellner, 2005).

It is interesting to read along the lines of T.N. Madan's exploration of Hindu rituals in South Asia, particularly in the context of Nepal's mask performances, which investigate the relationship between religious practices and social structures. Madan critically examines how these mask dances are not merely artistic expressions but deeply rooted in Nepalese society's religious and mythological framework. His work challenges the often-superficial interpretations of these rituals as cultural spectacles, arguing instead that they serve as potent symbols of the community's collective identity. By focusing on the performative aspects of Nepal's mask dances, such as those found in the Newar community, Madan reveals the underlying philosophical dimensions that connect these performances to broader Hindu cosmology and ethical systems.

In the Mahakali dance festival in Nepal, masks are of profound significance, serving both spiritual and cultural functions (Fig. 7).



Figure 7: Mahakali Dance festival, Madhyapur Thimi in evening of Gaijatra (May, 2011).

According to historian and anthropologist Dr Shyam Prasad Poudel, the masks used in the *Mahakali* dance embody divine and supernatural entities, reflecting the community's spiritual beliefs and practices (Poudel, 2020). Spiritually, these masks are believed to embody the divine or supernatural beings they portray, establishing a tangible connection between the physical world and the spiritual realm. Performers who wear these masks are thought to channel the powers and qualities of the represented deities or spirits, thus facilitating the expulsion of malevolent influences and ensuring the community's protection. Culturally, the masks are masterpieces of local craftsmanship, reflecting the rich heritage of the region. They act as visual narrations of age-old stories and myths, adding depth, character, and drama to the dance performances. The masks not only enhance the visual impact of the festival but also play a critical role in preserving and communicating the traditions and beliefs that define the *Mahakali* dance festival, making them an indispensable part of this vibrant and spiritually significant celebration.

Moreover, Madan's analysis suggests that these mask performances are dynamic rituals that actively shape and are shaped by the social hierarchies and power relations within Nepalese society. He critiques the tendency to view these rituals as static traditions, instead highlighting their role in negotiating social cohesion and reinforcing communal boundaries. The mask dances, therefore, are not just reflections of religious beliefs but are also sites of cultural contestation and negotiation, where social norms and values are both affirmed and challenged. In this way, Madan's work aligns with and extends Dr Ramprasad Bhattarai's research, offering a more nuanced understanding of how Nepal's mask dances function as complex socio-religious practices that contribute to the ongoing construction and maintenance of cultural identity.

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in preserving and revitalising the mask dance tradition. Various cultural organisations and local communities have undertaken initiatives to document and promote these practices. UNESCO's recognition of the mask dance as an Intangible Cultural Heritage has further bolstered these efforts, highlighting its global significance and the need for conservation (UNESCO, 2010). The mask dance has also adapted to contemporary contexts, incorporating modern elements while retaining its traditional essence. The adaptability is evident in the fusion of traditional and modern dance forms, the use of new materials for masks, and the incorporation of social and environmental themes into the performances (Wright, 2013). These efforts are also supported by local governments and NGOs, which organise festivals and workshops to educate younger generations about the cultural importance of mask dances (Adhikari, 2014). For instance, contemporary artists are experimenting with multimedia presentations that combine traditional mask dances with modern visual and audio effects, thereby attracting a wider audience and ensuring the tradition's relevance in the modern world (Singh, 2017).

Conclusion

The mask tradition of Nepal is a living art of performance that is a testament which breathes resilience, creativity and spirituality of the people of Nepal. Tracing from the shamanic roots to its embodiment into Bon and Buddhist religious ceremonial practices, the masked dance of Nepal has transformed through various stages and epochs, while adhering to the collective consciousness of several communities across Nepal. The legacy amidst the contemporary transgressions and fluctuations due to globalisation underlines a crucial aspect of conserving cultural diversity

as well as culminating intercultural dialogue. One of the significant findings of this research is the critical role of mask dances in preserving and promoting Nepalese cultural heritage. The detailed ethnographic studies reveal that these dances are not just artistic expressions but are deeply embedded in the community's way of life. They play a crucial role in maintaining cultural continuity and transmitting traditional knowledge and values across generations (Macdonald, 1989). The mask dance tradition has shown remarkable resilience and adaptability in the face of socio-political changes and globalisation. The ability of these dances to incorporate contemporary themes and modern techniques while retaining their traditional essence highlights their dynamic nature. This adaptability ensures their continued relevance and popularity among both local and global audiences (Ramble, 2008).

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Animal Mask Dance of Odisha, India

PRASANA KUMAR DASH

Animal mask dance (*Pashumukha Nrutya* or *Baagha Naacha*) is a sublime dance form in the cultural tapestry of Odisha, a state in eastern India. It is often called as giant puppet dance because of the size of the mask. This dance is confined to the district of Ganjam, bordering the state of Andhra Pradesh. *Pashumukha Nrutya* reflects the simplicity of tribal people and their imagination of the animal kingdom. Predators like tigers and lions assume the role of a protector, converting the awe and fear of the animals into a strange alliance with them. The movement of the animals in the dance arouses feelings, that reflect the reality in the animal kingdom. Synchronising the steps of the animals with the rhythm of the instrumental music connects man reflexively and often comically with the animals. The dance is based on folklore, and often mythological narratives, which portray various emotions. It is a living tradition, entrenched in rituals and it continues as a theatrical performance.



Figure 1: Animal masks seen in Viranchi Narayan Temple, Buguda, Ganjam

Origin

Although no document is available regarding the origin of the dance form, we have to depend on secondary sources, like folklore to trace its origin. An eminent folklorist Kedar Mishra says, “There is also a spread of *tantric* heritage and occult rituals in this region which has metamorphosed into many odd forms of life including dance aesthetics when a vermillion-coated stone becomes a goddess, a mask-clad dancer transforms into a man-eater wild beast.” This region has the tradition of worshipping theriomorphic goddesses and the devotees offer terracotta horses as votives to the goddesses, which often emerge from pieces of formless stone. Due to the reciprocal influence of Hinduization and tribalization, “the cross-cultural encounter and convergence of these two areas is an essential feature of Odisha’s cultural identity and its regional tradition, culture and history” (Eschmann *et al.*, eds. 1978; Kulke and Berkemer 2011).

Originating from a tribal background, *Pashumukha Nrutya* travelled into the fold of Hindu culture, without being alienated from the former and totally absorbed by the latter. The fear of the wild beast and the grace in its gait as the king of the forest creates a psychological urge



Figure 2: White tiger negotiates with another Tiger. Performance by Biswa Janani Kala Parishad at Chilika Shelduck Folk Carnival | Photo: P.K. Dash

among tribes to be a tiger, not in reality, but with a mask. The Kondh tribals of the Ghumusar area and particularly the Bada Kodanda village of the Ganjam district, infested with tigers often used masks, in order to minimise the fear element against the wild beast. The tribals had to depend on the forest for their livelihood and very often they encountered tigers in the forest. Such encounters captured their imagination leading to conceptualisation of the tiger mask as a way to masquerade their fear of the beast. The tiger mask as an apotropaic figure easily appealed to the tribes in Ghumusar. Their stylised gaits, ornate costumes, rhythmic, lyrical and tuneful music, multi-style modulations, gestures and postures



Figure 3: Thakurani idol of Banj Nagar
Photo: Narayan Maharana

are found to be parts of the tribal and traditional dances of south Odisha. (J. K. Behera, 2016)

According to oral tradition, the practice of *Pashumukha Nrutya* started in the 9th century AD, when tiger masks were used in ritual processions of the Thakurani (Goddess). The epidemics like cholera and smallpox, also treated as Thakurani, were to be appeased for the heal up and for protection of the village from the epidemic. Processions in the villages were common in which the tiger masks were used. *Pashumukha Nrutya* is therefore popularly known as '*Baagha Naacha*' (Tiger dance).

After the decline of Buddhism in Odisha, Shiva worship was the predominant faith during the 9th century AD. In Hindu mythology, Shiva is believed to stay in the burial ground, wearing a tiger skin and moving sitting on a bull, called Nandi. Parvati, the consort of Shiva moves on a lion. The animals play an important role in Shaivite pantheon. Shiva and Parvati are known as the God of Destruction and Goddess of Love, respectively.

It is believed that to appease Goddess *Thakurani* (*Parvati*), the tribals used tiger masks or painted themselves as tiger and performed

in processions of '*Thakurani*', says Narayan Maharana, a master performer and director of *Pashumukha Nrutya*. The king of Ghumusar and the forefather of the famous poet Upendra Bhanj offered many wooden masks to the Biranchi Narayan temple of Buguda, Ganjam. The biggest wooden masks are seen in Bada Kodanda village. Harihar Maharana, the son of Jogi Maharana used to make wooden puppets and masks. The community hall (Kotha Ghar) of Bada Kodanda and Vegeputu village ordered masks with their surplus savings and provided those for display in ritualistic processions.

The local folklore, as narrated by Jagdish Panigrahi, the Director of Biswa Janani Kala Parishad, an organisation for performance of *Pashumukha Nrutya*, believes that the young poet and prince Upendra Bhanj of Gumusar (1670-1740 AD), Ganjam presented his poems before the assembly of poets in the royal court of Puri Gajapati king. He was ridiculed as a novice and his poetry was rated substandard. He returned



Figure 4: Kuladgarh Byghra Devi temple.
Photo: Narayan Maharana



Figure 5 and 6: Wooden masks of lion, bull, deer, black buck, horse and tiger, inside an enclosure of the Viranchi Narayan Temple, Buguda | Photo: P.K. Dash

crestfallen and went to the *Kuladgarh Byaghra Devi* (Tiger Goddess) temple in Ghumusar and was determined to fast until his death. Seeing his penance, Devi appeared before him and advised him to go to the Raghunath temple of Odogaon, Nayagarh to practise the *Ramatarak* prayer. He followed her advice and became a legendary poet in Odia literature. Thus, the exorcist power of the goddess built a strong faith around her among the locals.

Evolution of Pashumukha Nrutya:

During festivals, the masks of tigers, lions, bulls, deer, black buck etc of huge size were displayed in front of the Devi temple of Ghumusar. The masks were displayed with the support on the temple walls or on bamboo poles. They were called 'Dera Vesha' (mask standing with support). The masks with huge size animal heads were made of wood and the body of the animal was



Figure 7: An elephant mask and body decorated with applique, standing with the help of two performers. Performance by Biswa Janani Kala Parishad at Chilika Shelduck Folk Carnival | Photo: P.K. Dash



Figure 8: White tiger runs across the crowd. Performance by Biswa Janani Kala Parishad at Chilika Shelduck Folk Carnival | Photo: P.K. Dash

made of cane or bamboo netting covered with clothes, which looked like a ‘Dera’ (tent house). Therefore, another interpretation is that it was known as Dera Vesha, as the body resembled a tent.

As the masks gained popularity, there was demand from various festival places like Sital Sasthi festival for Shiva, Janmastami festival for Krishna, Durgastami festival for Durga etc. to display masks in front of the temples. Bullock carts were used to carry the huge masks from the goddess temple at Ghumusar to other places during the festivals. Therefore, it was called as *Sagada* (bullock cart) *Vesha*.



Figures 9 and 10: Two performers painted their bodies as the tigers. They are fighting on stage in Chitrita Baagha Naacha. Performance at Chilika Shelduck Folk Carnival | Photo: Asis Dhir



Figures 11 and 12: Two performers’ faces painted as tigers with the tiger mask on head. Performance at Chilika Shelduck Folk Carnival | Photo: Asis Dhir

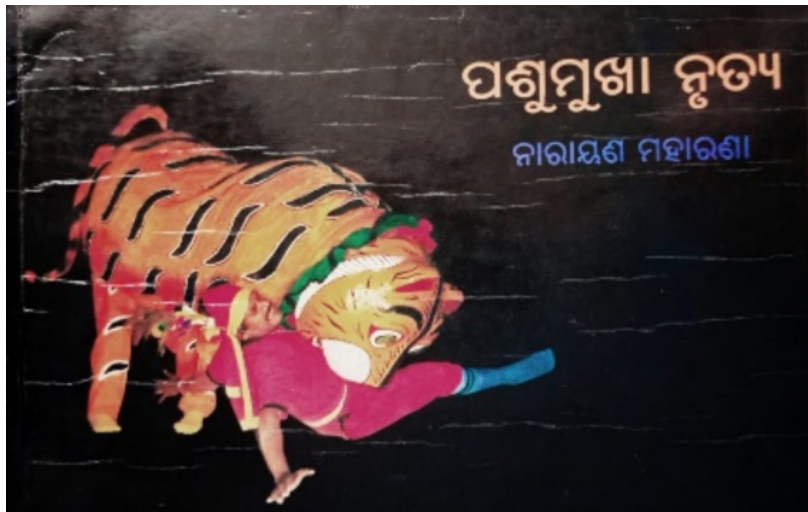


Figure 13: Tiger lifting a poacher in Pashumukha Nrutya
Photo: Narayan Maharana

In the next phase, people started dancing with the animal masks in processions, with accompaniment of instrumental music. For convenience, the size of masks decreased for easy handling by the performers. Materials to make masks also changed from wood to cow dung, paper, bamboo frame etc. There is another type of *Baagha Naacha*, prevalent in the area with the performer's body painted as a tiger. It is called '*Chitrita Baagha Naacha*' (painted tiger dance).

The animal mask dance was performed for entertainment in marriage processions or other fairs, instead of being confined to temples and festival sites. Under the guidance of Dhirendra Nath Pattanaik, former secretary, Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi and with the artistic skill of Guru Narayan Maharana, *Pashumukha Nrutya* was accepted as a part of theme-based theatrical performance and was performed outside in Russia and other countries during the festival of India in 1987.

Materials

The masks were traditionally made of wood, when it started as *Dera Vesha*. The wooden log is cut as per the size of the face and the inside mass of the wood is carved out to make it lightweight. The surface of the wood is smeared with a thick



Figure 14: Pashumukha Nrutya team under Guru Narayan Maharana | Photo: Narayan Maharana
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1cTi-pCmt4>

layer of mixture made of cow dung, paste from the seeds of tamarind, one poisonous stone powder called 'Giridi' and a poisonous fruit. The cow dung is filtered to take out the roughage from it. The tamarind seeds are crushed and boiled to make a thick paste. The poisonous stone powder from the *Mayur Giria* stone is boiled with cow dung and tamarind seed to prevent the wood from insect attack. Then the surface is allowed to dry. After it is completely dried, a cloth is pasted with the *Kaintha atha* (gum made from resin of elephant apple tree.) The cloth prevents the surface from cracking. Then a layer of chalk powder is applied on the surface to make it uniform and white. After this another rounded soft stone pebble called *Giridi* is rubbed on it to further smoothen the chalk powder surface. Now the surface is ready for painting. This is the same process as *patti* in Odisha pattachitra and Puri Jagannath trinity are made.

Nowadays, the use of wooden masks is not common, as handling these are difficult because of its weight. The artisans use masks made of papier-mache or mixture of jute, wood dust and cow dung. In UNESCO sponsored study, Ayantika Chakraborty and Atanu Chatterjee observe, "The mask-making process practised in



Figures 15,16 and 17: Wooden masks of Hanuman (Monkey God) and other demons. Courtesy: Purvasha Folk and Tribal Art Museum
Photo: P.K. Dash

Chadhiapalli village of Ganjam district, Odisha, is quite complex and involves multiple steps. At the very first stage, cow dung and wood dust are mixed together to form a gooey mixture. Today the artisans use concrete moulds on which they bedaub a thick layer of this gooey mixture. Next, they keep it under the sun to dry for a few days. Once dried, 50 layers of waste paper are pasted onto it with the help of homemade tamarind gum. In the next stage, they cover the mask with layers of coarse or fine old fabrics. To make the surface smooth, they do truculent polishing with black stone. Thereafter, they layer the surface with a solution of water and chalk dust to make it look whiter, which provides a perfect canvas for colouring. Following this, they polish the white-washed surface with white stones to make the surface smoother. And finally, they paint the masks with brush and synthetic colours.”

Krushna Nayak of Bada Kodanda village and Guru Narayan Maharana of Vegeputu village, Bhanjanagar also make masks for *Pashumukha Nritya*. In Belguntha village in Bhanjanagar the artisans are still preparing masks from cow dung. Masks are also made in Karadagada village of Begunia.

As per the UNESCO study in Chadheipalli village, a 70-year-old mask maker, Subhas Maharana says that the practice has been in continuation for more than three generations. He also informed that the mask-making tradition in the village was initially patronised by the Bhanja dynasty. Kabi Samrat Upendra Bhanja, widely known as the poet- king of Bhanjanagar took the initiative to relocate the Maharana



Figure 18: Different varieties of the finished masks along with a few half-painted ones left to dry in the sun on a rooftop studio. The masks are kept with the moulds
Photo: Ayantika Chakraborty and Atanu Chatterjee

community from the then Singbhum region (presently Jharkhand) to Bhanjanagar in Ganjam district. Consequently, the Chadhiapalli village was established in the late seventeenth century, which was the ruling period of Kavi Samrat Upendra Bhanja.

Women members of the household would help in preparing the raw materials and painting on the masks. However, the income from mask making is on the downside, as very few masks are sold.

Natural colours like *hingula* for red, *haritali* for yellow, lamp black or coconut shell burnt carbon black, and conch shell powder as white colour used to be applied with *Kaintha* (elephant

apple) *atha* (binder). *Jau* (Lacquer) is coated on the colour to make it glossy and safe from water. For easy processing, some artists are using synthetic colour. But prominent *pashumukha nrutya* groups still use the traditional colour and traditional materials.

The body of the animal is made with a frame made of cane or flattened bamboo, which is covered with colourful clothes and applique works. The applique work makes the animal body look attractive and beautiful.

Some performers are using fibre glass, instead of these natural materials. Such masks made of fibre glass don't look as authentic, as the traditional masks. These masks have different surface, colour and texture.

Types of Masks in Pashumukha Nrutya

Most popular among the pashumukas are the tiger masks. In tiger mask category, the yellow tiger and white tiger masks are frequently used in dance. One performer lifts and operates the head of tiger by entering inside the mask and another performer enters inside the body, connected with the mask and operates it. Their



Figure 19: The yellow tiger kills the poacher and lifts his dead body from the ground with the help of its canine teeth, while the white tiger gracefully observes the action. Performance by Biswa Janani Kala Parishad at Chilika Shelduck Folk Carnival | Photo: Jagdish Panigrahi

dress is specially made to match with tiger body and legs. Both the performers synchronise the stepping and movement of head of tiger mask to give an impression of a huge tiger. The neck of the tiger is made flexible and moveable. While the tiger dances, the head is raised upwards, down wards and side wards, to match with the graceful gait of the tiger. The approach of the tigers to the rhythm of the music and drums makes it very interesting in *Pashumukha Nrutya*. The two canine teeth of the masks are too strong. After killing the poacher, the performer lifts the poacher's dead body with his teeth, which gives the impression that the tiger is carrying the dead body after the kill.

Manmath Padhi writes,

"The thematic variations include the encounter between tiger and ox, encounter between tiger and hunter and tiger preying on horse etc. With amazing synchronization the dancers move so artistically as per the rhythm played, the movements of the tiger appear realistic. *Dhola*, *Mahuri* instruments are played to create the environment and rhythmic sense. Roaring, watching, jumping and running movements are displayed in this".

The horse mask in *Pashumukha Nrutya* is called the '*Kala Ghoda Mask*' (mechanised horse mask), as it is different from the *Chaiti Ghoda* mask (another form of *Ghoda Naacha*) of coastal Odisha. In *Pashumukha Nrutya*, the head of the horse is attached at one end of a long bamboo stump, which is tied to the body of the horse. This acts as a lever to increase or decrease the height of the neck of the horse by raising the stump to different heights by the performer. Since the horse mask is raised to different heights, with the help of a lever or machine (*Kala*), it is called *Kala ghoda Nrutya*. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkviTH3EWzE>)

In contrast, the horse mask in *Chaiti Ghoda Nrutya*, as seen in coastal Odisha is fixed and one performer moves the body along with the head together and there is no flexibility in movement



Figure 20: The white Horse mask and the body decorated with applique works in Kala Ghoda nrutya is operated by two performers from within its body. Performance by Biswa Janani Kala Parishad | Photo Jagdish Panigrahi

of the head of the horse. In *Chiti Ghoda Nrutya*, the performer holds the mask of a horse at the waist level and another performer holds a different mask of a contrasting colour at the same waist level. The head, upper part of the body and legs of the performers are visible to the audience. In *Chaiti Ghoda Naacha*, the performers engage in an interactive dialogue between a fisherman



Figure 21: Two Chaiti ghoda (horse with a fixed head) and the body made of cane. The performer enters inside the body from the top of it and dances with his head and upper portion of body visible to the viewers. Courtesy: Purvasha Folk and Tribal art Museum | Photo P. K. Dash <https://youtu.be/JQNTJu7BxnM?si=nknyCSkMETIqTHZY>

and fisherwoman, often parodying stories from their own life.

The mechanised bull masks (*Kala Brushav*) in *Pashumukha Nrutya* are also operated with a lever like *Kala ghoda nach* to move the head upwards and sideways. The bull has a stump attached to its head, which is longer than the



Figure 22: A black buck with two performers within its body is being lured with grass by the human being. Performance by Biswa Janani Kala Parishad at Chilika Shelduck Folk Carnival | Photo P. K. Dash



Figures 23 and 24: A deer buck with two performers within its body. Performance by Biswa Janani Kala Parishad at Chilika Shelduck Folk Carnival | Photo P. K. Dash

horse mask elevating the bull mask to a greater height. They are seen in two colours one white and one black. Bull, the carrier of Lord Shiva is used in Pashumukha Nrutya to depict *Shiva tandav* (cosmic dance) stories. The bull jumps on the stage from one end to another, while Shiva dances on the stage. The dance of the bull is sometimes scary as it raises its long neck

to a great height and then pulls it down. Two performers inside lift bull's mask upward and pull downward. https://youtu.be/6ofSUiU_BP0?si=MV86BjBtpQnEPuY

Deer masks are used in two types, one for yellow deer and another for black buck. Both the deer are operated by two performers, who are seen jumping on the stage from one end to



Figures 25 and 26: The elephant mask of Ganesha (the elephant God) and Nrusingha (Lion man) are used in *Prahlad Natak*, a repertoire of 150 years old. Courtesy: Purvasha Folk and tribal art museum, Odi Art centre, Chilika. Photo: Asis Dhir



Figure 27: The wooden mask of Ganesha (Elephant god) is used in Prahlad Natak. Courtesy: Purvasha Folk and tribal art museum, Odi Art centre, Chilika. | Photo: Asis Dhir

another. Bear mask is also used to narrate the story involving bear. The lion mask is used to depict stories relating to Goddess Durga, whose carrier is lion. Elephant mask is used to narrate

story of Goddess *Laxmi* and *Sriya Chandaluni* (sweeper caste) in narrating the story of Laxmi Purana.

Nav Gunjar (Nine animals in one) is another important mask to narrate the story of Odia Mahabharat. This story is unique in Odia Mahabharat, written by Sarala Das. In the *Khandab vana* (forest) story, Krishna appeared before Arjuna in a mystical form with parts of nine animals, called *Nav Gunjar*. The nine parts of this animal are the beak of a cock, the neck of a peacock, a mound of the bull on the back, the belly of a lion, a snake as its tail, one leg of an elephant, one leg of a tiger, one leg of the horse and one hand of a woman holding a lotus. After seeing this imaginary animal, Arjuna was mesmerised and instead of attacking the animal with an arrow and bow, he surrendered to it. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=SsmRZqgD4dI>)

In *Prahlad Natak*, another popular dance form of Ganjam, the lion-headed God Narasimha and Lord Ganesha are seen wearing masks, while the human actors like Prahlad, his mother Leelavati and his father Hiranya Kashipu don't wear masks.



Figures 28, 29, 30 and 31: The masks of Shyama Mukhi, Durga, Jwala Mukhi and Kali to narrate the various manifestation of Goddess Durga. Courtesy: Purvasha Folk and Tribal Art museum, Odi Art centre, Chilika | Photo: Asis Dhir



Figure 32: A parrot mask operated by a performer being led by the narrator. Performance by Biswa Janani Kala Parishad at Chilika Shelduck Folk Carnival I Photo P. K. Dash



Figure 33: Badshah Begum Masks
Photo Jagdish Panigrahi.

In Thakurani jatra, another ritual dance form of Ganjam, four masks of Goddess Parvati with half busts are seen. The heads of Goddess in four different colours with half body frame are operated by the performers. The blue colour mask is called *Shyama mukhi*, Black colour is called Kali, the red colour is called *Jwala mukhi*, the yellow colour is called *Peetambri* or Durga (Yellow saree). One performer wears only one mask and four performers wearing four

masks dance to the rhythm of the music. Unlike *Pashumukha Nrutya*, the flexibility in movement of the head or body is not there in *Thakurani* (Goddess) masks.

The *Badshah begum* (Muslim king and wife) masks, *Sapa Sapuani Naacha* are seen in *Pashumukha Nrutya*. They dance to the tune of the music, which makes an attractive and enjoyable scene.



Figure 34: White tiger dancing to the rhythm of the instruments and being led by the narrator. Performance by Biswa Janani Kala Parishad at Chilika Shelduck Folk Carnival I Photo P. K. Dash



Figures 35: Goddess Durga with her carrier lion. Performance by Biswa Janani Kala Parishad at Chilika Shelduck Folk Carnival
I Photo P. K. Dash

Storyline

Myths from the Mahabharat and the Ramayan provide the social, cultural and natural foundations of reality and *Pashumukha Nrutya* adopted certain myths from the epics to evoke, enlighten, transform and shape the psychic dimensions of the viewers. The theme ranges from the simplistic bullfight with a white and a black bull, tiger and man fight, to the complex Durga with ten hands and a lion as her carrier, fighting with Mahishasura (Buffalo demon), and the mythological *Nav Gunjar* with nine body parts of nine animals.



Figure 36: Mahisha Mardini Durga with demon Mahishasura and Fibre glass masks of Durga, Lion and Mahishasura, used by Guru Alok bishoyi I Photo: Alok Bishoyi <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqy1a-cQBx4>

Save the tiger

This has been a very popular episode, where a poacher enters the forest to kill the tiger. Two tigers enter the stage. The poacher plans to kill the tiger but ends up in fierce fighting with the tigers. The tigers finally kill the poacher. The dead body is lifted with the help of the canine teeth of one tiger with the message that killing tiger is dangerous. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6qE8bVoKM8>

Mahisha Mardini Durga

Mahishasura is the buffalo demon, who did penance and got the boon as invincible to any male being. The buffalo mask performer dances on the stage after getting the boon. He terrorised Gods and goddesses. Finally, all Gods combined their energy to create Durga, the female divine power and armed her with all weapons. Lion is the carrier of Durga. The lion mask performer enters with Durga and Durga fights with Buffalo demon.

Shiva Tandav

Shiva Tandav is the cosmic dance of Shiva, associated with creation, preservation and destruction. Shiva Tandav has influenced many art forms like Bharat Natyam, Kathak and also the painters and sculptors, who make a dancing Shiva within a circle of flames called Shiva Tandav. This imagery makes the boundary between

terrestrial and celestial space porous, reflecting the cosmic dimension of life. In *Pashumukha Nrutya*, the dance starts with the *kala Brushav* (bull operated with the help of a lever) dance, in which the bulls enter the stage as carrier of Shiva. Ravan with ten-headed masks, the primary antagonist of the epic Ramayan worships Shiv and after seeing his penance, Shiva is pleased and gives him soon. Ravana then dances merrily, which disturbs the cosmic balance. The animals run helter skelter. Then Shiv starts the cosmic dance Tandav to restore the balance.

Decline and revival

The neglect of the colonial rulers is evident after 1803 and they looked at the rituals with disdain. Their effort to give training in schools gave a deadly blow to the folk traditions. *Pashumukha* had grown under *Gurushishya Parampara* (Teacher-disciple tradition), where the disciple stays in the house of the Guru and learns from him. Sometimes, it is learnt through family traditions, where the offspring are trained in the art from their childhood. It was not encouraged in the school curriculum introduced by the British rulers. On the other hand, the colonial rulers didn't take any interest nor did invest any amount for the survival of this craft and the accompanying dance form.

Narayan Maharana of Vegeputu village, under the guidance of Dharendra Nath Pattnaik, former secretary of Odisha Sangeet Natak Akademi took *Pashumukha Nrutya* to theatrical stage prominence. With the masterly skills and training by Pattanaik, Upendra Bhanj Loka Nrutya Parishad under the leadership of *sutradhar* (narrator) Narayan Maharana performed for the first time in the Festival of India 1987 in USSR. It got a facelift from being confined to festival processions in a remote place of Ganjam to a global stage. Guru Narayan Maharana has played a seminal role in introducing themes with folk

music and took it to the global stage with his performances in several countries, like London, New Zealand and others.

Guru Shantanu Das and Jagdish Panigrahi, founders of Biswa Janani Kala Parishad, Bhanj Nagar maintained the authenticity of the dance performance with traditional masks. Guru Alok Bishoyi, Digapahandi and his troupe Bichitra Barnali Natya Sansad have curated *Pashumukha Nrutya* with several new themes and for ease of handling, introduced fibre glass masks into the dance. Besides these Gurus, Budhia Gouda, Panchanan Swain, Abhimanyu Gouda, Banchhanidhi Jena, Kalia Bishoyi *et al*, of Bada Kodanda also perform mask dance in processions.

Challenges

The demand for making masks has decreased. Performing *Pashumauka Nrutya* is not very lucrative. With the advent of TVs and smart phones in the villages, the traditional taste for entertainment of the villagers has undergone a change. The appeal of folk dance is replaced by modern cinema and TV serials. The folkdance forms face a severe challenge to their survival.

Another challenge is to carry traditional *Pashumukha Nrutya* masks of huge size, from one place to another for performance. More than ten performers are required for performance with accompaniment of live instrumental music and the remuneration is not sufficient for a team. The performers are not given stipend by the government to continue with *Pashumukha Nrutya*.

The apathy of the government for the handicraft of making masks is evident from the fact that the investment in the sector is not in commensurate with the inflated cost of production. "These problems are associated with shortage of raw materials, problems of marketing, non-availability of working capital, competition

from large scale industries, problems of labour etc.” says Mahendra P. Agasty, Janmejaya Senapati in their study on handicrafts of Odisha. Wood and cane are the basic raw material, for wooden mask making. There are many restrictions for carrying raw wood and cane from one place to another.

The investment by the government to provide working capital to the artisans is minimal and insufficient. Tourism and handicrafts go hand in hand, but unfortunately government has not taken any initiative for GI tagging or for the promotion of craft villages. As a result, marketing the handcrafted mask is difficult for the craftsmen, as they don't get market access.

Pashumukha Nrutya requires research by skilled trainers, who are adept in the art. They can bring in novelty, keeping the tradition intact and inspire curiosity among viewers, critical thinking, and a love for learning among the students.

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Radha Khrisna in Seraikella Chhau Dance, Dancer Govind Mahto and Tripti Thapliyal.
Photo Source: Ramesh Lalwani



Social and Religious Significance of *Seraikela Chhau* Mask Dance

ANURAG ANAND

Introduction

A festival is a recurring celebration that involves an entire community. Every culture commemorates significant events with festivals, often incorporating performances. While some festivals are tied to the seasonal cycle, others mark milestones in human life. Additionally, some festivals are recurring celebrations that involve an entire community. Every culture commemorates significant events with festivals, often incorporating performances. While some festivals are tied to the seasonal cycle, others mark milestones in human life. Additionally, some festivals honour the history of a community, whether it is a village, city, or nation.

One such performance that has brought recognition to the princely state of Seraikella is the Seraikella Chhau mask dance. Chhau is a dance form performed annually during the April festival of Chaitra Parva in an area comprising the



Saraikela masks, displayed on one side of the veranda in Dilip's house, represent nine emotions or *rasa* depicted by Bharata muni- (Navaras) – *shringara* (love/beauty), *hasya* (laughter), *karuna* (sorrow), *raudra* (anger), *veera* (heroism/courage), *bhayanaka* (terror/fear), *bibhatsa* (disgust), *adbutha* (surprise/wonder) and *shantha* (peace/tranquility). (Ashwini Kumar Shukla, 2024)

border regions of northern Orissa, southwest Bengal, and southeast Bihar. The landscape in this area is barren and hilly, with dense scrub forests, still full of small game such as deer, wild boar, pheasants, and peacocks, surrounding pockets of arid farmland.

Although the rulers, landlords, and other upper classes and upper-caste Hindus, about sixty percent of the population is tribal in origin, including Santal, Munda, Kurmi, and others. These tribal peoples, with their rich traditions of music, dance, and ritual, have acquired an overlay of dress, custom, and belief which are widely practiced and worn in Hinduism, resulting in a combination of the earlier seasonal fertility, harvest, and animistic worship with Hindu gods and mythology. (Reck, 1972).

Psychology of Mask

Performers often wear a disguise, changing their appearance from their normal selves. The effect

of the disguise is, not only to present whatever character is being portrayed but to protect the actor's identity, to signify to the audience that this is acting as opposed to real life. Since human beings express their thoughts and feelings most fully through the face, it has long been a theatrical tradition for actors to cover their faces with masks when performing. In many parts of Asia, decorative masks are a striking feature of the performing arts.

Actors put on costumes to give them power, as well as protection. Putting on a mask, or otherwise disguising yourself, is a method of protection from an audience who might otherwise hold the actor responsible for all that he does on stage. The disguise allows him to speak and act boldly. The protective quality of a mask is of psychological significance, and it is a theatrical convention; shy people can sometimes be persuaded to speak out without fear while wearing a mask. Yet the putting on of a mask or costume can do far more than protection. It can also bestow power. While

this idea may be condemned as mere superstition, it is a superstition that has held powerful sway. (Devlin. 1989. p.53-81)

The word “prosopon” in Greek translates to “face,” signifying “that which is set before the eye,” and is also used to refer to a mask. In ancient times, the mask was considered a tool for actors to embody their characters. Similarly, the Latin word for mask, “persona,” denotes the category of a person. Over time, “prosopon” evolved to encompass meanings such as “personage,” “individual,” and “personality.” On the other hand, the Sanskrit equivalent “Purusha” or “manusha” (feminine form “manushi”) refers to a person or the micro-self embodying the macrocosmic dimension, offering a richer implication by including both the human and cosmic dimensions. Despite their differences, these ancient perspectives all indirectly refer to the complete personality of a person rather than just a facet of the self.

In modern times, the concept of the mask as a disguise that conceals a person’s true identity is rooted in post-Freudian psychology. Here, the mask is seen as a metaphor for the external self only. Individuals are often accused of “masking” their intentions or feelings, or of “hiding behind a mask.” The prevailing view is to consider the mask



Dilip, one of the last remaining artists making Saraikele masks, paints with precision, highlighting the eyes, lips, and cheeks based on the emotion the mask is meant to represent. (Ashwini Kumar Shukla, 2024)

an obstacle to understanding and a distortion of “truth.” However, in ancient cultures, the mask was viewed as a tool for revealing, giving form to the formless and the ineffable, and creating a bridge between the everyday world and the “other” super-sensible domain of gods, sacred entities, invisible powers of nature, and ancestral presences. In this context, the mask serves as a “transitional” object and functions as a potent symbol of power.

Masks have a complex nature in their use and application. Many scholars have observed the ambiguous role of masks: they both conceal and define identities. While concealing the wearer’s identity, masks also transform it into something entirely different. Masks can serve to obscure, depersonalize, or safeguard the wearer, while also presenting an alternate set of characteristics to transform the identity of the wearer. The presence of the human body is always implied; the use of masks establishes a dynamic interplay between the concepts of presence and absence. The masked dancer embodies a fusion of the lifeless and the living, the other and the self, the static and the dynamic, as well as matter and energy.

In our ongoing discussion, we consider the mask not as an isolated object, but rather as the intricate concept of the self/Purusha. This entails comprehending the mask within a cultural framework that encompasses the past, present, and future, and as a metaphor for interpreting and reassessing personal and cultural histories (RUPA - PRATIRUPA: MAN & MASK *An Exhibition from the IGNCA Collection of Masks*, 1998).

Origin and evolution of the dance form

There is a very old Oriya saying:

खरसुऔर यात्राघट ब्राह्मणिधाठिभा पाट
केरार कालिकाघट सदैकलिया नाट।।

*‘Kharsuanra Jatra Ghata Brahmani Ghatia Pata
Kerara Kalika Ghata Sadheikalia Nata’*

The Jatra Ghata of Kharswan, the Pat of Bamunghaty, the Kalika Ghata of Kera, and the Chhau dance of Seraikella are famous. This is the tract of land from which originated the famous Chhau dance and has spread over to other parts of Orissa. The Chhau dance has been nurtured under an atmosphere of independence, undisturbed by outside influence. The Seven Hundred Saranda Hills and the Hills of Bangriposi have given as much protection to the country against foreign inroads as against any cultural conquests. Simhabhumi and Bhanjabhumi (particularly Simhabhumi) have remained unconquered for centuries both politically and culturally. (Singh Deo, 1954. p. 94).

The Chhau dance is believed to have originated from the military camp of the Porahat Raj. According to legend, around the year 1590, during the reign of Raja Ranjit Singh of Porahat, Raja Mansingh, the General of Akbar the Great, visited Porahat on his way to Bengal. During their stay, Mughal soldiers were fascinated by the tribal dances of the region and organized a dance program for themselves. Initially, as soldiers, they were reluctant to dance in a feminine style, so they used masks. In the early period, it was a sword dance. After the departure of the Mughal soldiers, the rulers of the Porahat State developed the art of mask dancing, which later came to be known as the Chhau dance of this region (Vunna, 1964. p. 18-19). Based on the principles of Bharata's Natya Shastra it had assimilated into itself the Orissa style of dancing and to some extent the folk dances of numerous tribes that inhabited the region (Chattopadhyay, 1961. p. 85).

The ruling family always took a keen interest in this art. Some of the princes participated in this dance and were very good dancers, especially Rajkumar Shuvendra Narayan Singh Deo and Rajkumar Brojendra Narayan Singh Deo of Seraikella. (Singh Deo, 1954 p. 94).

The dance evolved and became popular in

the pre-independence era so much so that it was staged at many places in India and outside. After seeing this dance in 1937 Srimati Sarojini Naidu, the famous poet and nationalist leader of India was so deeply impressed that she spoke to Mahatma Gandhi and insisted that he must see it. In 1937, the Chhau dancers of Seraikella gave a command performance before Gandhiji in the residence of Sri Sarat Chandra Bose at Calcutta where Mahatma Gandhi was staying. On another occasion, this dance was performed at Shanti Niketan, and Rabindra Nath Tagore was profoundly impressed. In March 1947, a special show was presented at the York Road residence of the late Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru for distinguished guests of the Asian Relations Conference. These dancers performed in European countries also. In 1938, Prince Shuvendra Narayan Singhdeo led a team of Chhau dancers to the European countries. During this tour, he presented this dance in Great Britain and Italy also. (Singh Deo, 1973. p. 52-85).

Shashadhar Acharya, born in 1961, is a renowned Chhau dance exponent hailing from Saraikela, Jharkhand, India. In 2020, he was honoured with the Padma Shri by the Government of India in recognition of his significant contributions to the field of arts. Acharya, a fifth-generation dancer from his family, received his training in Chhau from his father, Lingaraj Acharya, and later from Natshekhar Bana Bihari Pattnaik, Vikram Karmakar, Kedarnath Sahu, and Sudhendranath Singhdeo. In the early 1990s, he relocated from Saraikela to work at the Gurukul Dance Academy and subsequently at the Prithvi Theatre in Mumbai. Currently, he serves as a faculty member at the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune, and at the National School of Drama, New Delhi. Additionally, he imparts his knowledge at the New Delhi-based Triveni Kala Sangam.



Shashadhar Acharya (born 1961) is a Chhau dance exponent from Saraikela, Jharkhand, India. In 2020, he received the Padma Shri honor from the Government of India for his contribution to the field of Arts. (The Dance India, 2020)

Techniques of the Dance

The Chhau dance technique originates from the *parikhanda* system of exercise, which was a crucial part of the training for the *sipahis*, or warriors, of Saraikella. The term “*pari*” means shield and “*khanda*” means sword. During the *parikhanda*, performers hold swords and shields while practicing the exercises. Traditionally, the *parikhanda* takes place in the early hours of the morning at a specific location on a raised land along the Kharkai River called Bhairavsal. This site is dedicated to Lord Shiva and features seven stone lingas, before which the *parikhanda* performers offer their respects before beginning their routine each morning. The exercise typically lasts about three hours, after which the performers take a dip in the Kharkai before continuing with their daily activities.

The *parikhanda* is always performed in the presence of a guru. Participants wear white dhotis and keep their upper bodies bare as they stand in a row facing the guru. The exercises follow a strict order, and during the performance, both the guru and the participants recite mnemonic



Seraikela Chhau performers during the act in traditional costumes. (Vishal Ranjan, 2020)



A Chhau dancer is practicing the steps of the dance, showcasing the Parikhanda system of exercise. (Vishal Ranjan, 2020)



A group of Chhau dancers practicing some warrior dance related to the *Parikhanda* system. (Vishal Ranjan, 2020)

syllables to guide the rhythm of the various steps and movements. The routine begins with a set of *chalis*, or stylized gaits, performed to the front, back, and sides, in single, double, and quadruple

tempi. Most of the *chalis* are named based on the steps taken, such as *arhichali* for crosswise steps, and *teenparhichali* for three steps at a time. However, some *chalis* are based on actual gaits,



A Chhau dancer practicing the steps of the dance, showcasing probably the bogchali (crane walk). (Vishal Ranjan, 2020)

like *bogchali* for crane walk, and *gaumutrachali* for the walk of a cow after urination. The *chalis* are followed by *upalayas*, which combine steps and movements suggestive of various actions. Examples of *upalayas* include *gutti-koorha* for lifting a pebble with the toes, *gobar-goola* for

mixing cow dung with water, *kulapachra* for husking paddy, and *bota-cheera* for splitting bamboo. It is said that in the past, there were over 100 *upalayas*, but currently, not even half of them are performed or remembered. (Khokar, Unknown. p. 25-32).



Seraikella Chhau Dance Mask of Durga (Left) and Shiva (Right). (Royal Ontario Museum, Global South Asia Collection)



Seraikela Chhau masks made of Cotton papers and beads from the collection of the ODI Art Centre. (ODI Art Center, Purvasha Folk and Tribal Art Museum)

Themes of the Dance

The themes and stories depicted in Seraikela Chhau's performances are often drawn from Hindu mythology, particularly the epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. However, the dance also incorporates elements of local folklore and everyday life. Common themes include the triumph of good over evil, warriors' heroism, and nature's beauty.

In his book "Chhau, Mask Dance of Seraikela," Jaga Bhanu Singh Deo discusses 60 themes that are commonly portrayed in performances. Among these themes, some of the lesser-explored ones include *Banobidha*, *Chandrabhaga*, *Eklabya*, *Madhukaitav*, *Meghdoot*, *Nabik*, *Phool-O-Basant*, *Haimantika*, and *Durjadhana Urubhanga*. These themes are just a few examples that we will explore further.

Banobidha: The literary idea of this theme is that "She lived in beauty, splendor, and love; when the cruel arrow pierced her tender heart."



Act of Nabik being played by the Seraikella Chhau performer. (Cultural oneness with Utkal: The Chhow Dance)



The performers are enacting the Chandrabhaga act. (Vishal Ranjan, 2020)

The dance movement projects the sprightliness of the animal, but a palpable undertone of pain permeates the whole composition. Divided into three parts, this dance shows; (i) The agony of the arrow (ii) The earlier life of love, grace, and innocence (iii) The inevitable end.

Chandrabhaga: The theme eloquently narrates the poignant legend behind the creation of the magnificent Sun Temple of Konarak in Orissa, as depicted through a traditional dance performance. It tells the story of Chandrabhaga, the daughter of Sage Sumanya, and her tragic



The performers are enacting the Ratri Act. (The Dance India, 2020)

fate at the hands of the Sun God. The dance masterfully portrays the complexities of love and hate, passion and virtue, attraction, and repulsion, and the ensuing tragedy, ultimately affirming the triumph of chastity over the primal passions of the divine beings. Legend has it that the renowned temple at Konark stands at the confluence of the River Chandrabhaga and the sea, symbolizing the site of Chandrabhaga's untimely demise.

Madhukaitav: Madhukaitava, a demon with ambitions of world domination, is devoted to the worship of force. Thanks to a boon granted by Lord Shiva, he is invincible as long as he avoids contact with women. His days are dedicated to crafting and repairing his bows, honing his arrows, and perfecting his spears. Fearing his power, the gods plot to send the beautiful Apsara, Tillotama, to seduce and bring about his

downfall. In a moment of passionate embrace, the demon succumbs to the divine enchantress, and an arrow of death finds its mark in his heart.

Phool-O-Basant: The theme explores the arrival of spring, beauty, and colour abound, as the blossoming flowers of spring evoke eternal intertwining in the hearts of men and women. The woman exudes beauty and splendour, while the primal nature of man finds joy in expressing his prowess and pride. Together, they are captivated by the spirit of eternal spring.

Haimantika: is a traditional dance theme performed by village maidens to celebrate a bountiful harvest, accompanied by the clapping of men.

The use of masks is a distinctive feature of Seraikella Chhau, with each mask embodying the essence of the character or theme being portrayed. (Singh Deo, 1973. p. 60-74).



Seraikella dance practitioners getting ready for the performance. (Vishal Ranjan, 2020)

Social Significance

In the context of Seraikella Chhau, it is noteworthy that only male participants were traditionally involved in this dance form, with women being strictly prohibited from taking part. (Kumar Paty, 2002. p.146).

Thirteen days of rituals precede the dances. Thirteen worshippers from twelve different castes fast and perform daily religious rites. These devotees are drawn from Oriya castes such as Teli, Tamli, Khadra, Kansari, Patra, Gudia, Bania, Dandia, and other similar castes. (Singh Deo, 1954. p.94)

It is essential to note that whenever the *Chait Parba* or the Chhau dance is performed in locations such as Seraikella, Kharswan, Porahat, Gamharia, Bhurkuli, Bejoy, Nuagan, Jaddiha, Sonua, Chakradharpur, Kandra, Keraikella, Dugni, Icha, Raruan, Baripada (Mayurbhanj), Bonai, Nilgri, Keonjhar, Dhenkanal, Talcher, Jhumpudia, or Bala-Rampur, the '*Jatra Ghata*' ceremony must be conducted. The *Jatra Ghata* is a procession ritual associated with the Shaiva and Shakti cults. The underlying rituals of the *Chaitra Paraba* resemble those of the '*Danda Jatra*' or '*Danda Nata*' of South Orissa and Garjats. (Singh Deo, 1954. p.96)

Conclusion

In summary, Seraikela Chhau serves as a vibrant testament to India's rich cultural heritage, seamlessly blending mythology, history, and the performing arts into a mesmerizing display of movement and expression. Its intricate masks and dynamic dances not only mirror the traditions of the Seraikela region but also encapsulate a deep bond between the community and its cultural identity.

It is imperative to make concerted efforts to ensure the sustained prosperity of Seraikela Chhau. This involves increasing visibility through digital platforms, advocating for the



Seraikella chhau practitioner performing the Dance. (The Creative Tribal, 2023)

dance at national and international cultural festivals, and incorporating it into educational curricula. The establishment of specialized academies and the provision of financial support to practitioners can aid in preserving traditional techniques while encouraging innovation. By embracing preservation and evolution, Seraikela Chhau can continue to captivate and inspire future generations.

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The Evolution of Theyyam Masks

A Journey through Kerala's Cultural Heritage

PAPRI DAS

Introduction

Theyyam is a ritualistic dance form that originated in the North Malabar region of Kerala. Theyyam as a dance form is a colourful composition with the elements of music and mime, which depicts the tradition and culture of the region. Originating mainly in the two districts of Kannur and Kasaragod, Theyyam, which means God, is an art that is much more than a mere dance; it is a worship where the community offers itself as well as its performance in pursuit of god. It is a dance that is done in sacred groves, and temples, and dancers are often required to go through a series of processes of 'possession' that turns them into spirits or gods.

Theyyam has considerable importance in the culture and religious performances of Kerala. It is not just art, it is a way to perform a ritual that dedicates the place as sacred and allows people to pray. The artists are dressed

in colorful costumes and bright masks; they retell myths and local narratives, thus sustaining morality and historical memory. Facial ornaments, such as paintings, are the other form of decoration that not only gives art to the face but also acts as a sign of the divine so that the turning of the performer from a mere mortal to a god is determined.

As much as this article focuses on Theyyam masks, it intends to lay down Theyyam history and culture, explain the meaning of Theyyam masks and the general process of mask making. Analyzing the variety of phases and tendencies of Theyyam masks. The study plans to look at the transformation of Theyyam masks over time and understand the social-cultural factors that have influenced this art form over the centuries. It is to provide a greater awareness of Theyyam and its masks and to stress the role of the masks in the region's cultural life and possibilities for the continued usage of that cultural experience in the approaching cultural globalization and contemporary society transformation.

Historical Origins of Theyyam

Etymology of Theyyam

The term “Theyyam” is derived from the Sanskrit word “*daivam*,” which means God. This etymological connection underscores the divine essence and reverence associated with Theyyam performances. The name itself signifies the transformation of a human into a god during the ritual, embodying the belief that the performer is an incarnation of the deity they represent. The term reflects the sacred and religious significance that Theyyam holds in the cultural fabric of Kerala.

Early Beginnings

Theyyam's origins can be traced back to the ancient folk traditions of Kerala, evolving from

primitive totemic worship practices. Early communities in North Malabar engaged in the worship of supernatural forces for prosperity and protection, which gradually incorporated elements of ancestor, serpent, animal, and mother goddess worship. The practice was deeply rooted in the region's socio-cultural and religious milieu, reflecting the community's attempts to connect with the divine through ritualistic performances.

Mythological and Legendary Characters

Theyyam is richly done with characters that are mythological and legendary, with each one differently mapped to different stories and attributes. Some of these prominent ones are

1. Vishnumoorthy Theyyam: This form represents the Vaishnavite tradition and narrates the story of Hiranyakashipu, Prahlad, and Narasimhamoorthi, Lord Vishnu's avatar. It shows the triumph of devotion and righteousness over evil. Vishnumoorthy Theyyam also shares its relation with the local legend regarding the deification of Palanthai Kannan, a devotee



Theyyam Dance

boy who was murdered innocently, thus showing justice and divine retribution.

2. Karimchamundi Theyyam: Among the fiercest presiding goddesses in Theyyam mythology stands Karimchamundi, who is famous for the slaying of the demon Mahishasura. Her narrative is deeply embedded within the local legends of North Kerala, symbolizing the ultimate power and wrath of the goddess in protecting the community from evil forces.
3. Bhairavan Theyyam: Of the Shaivite tradition, it represents Bhairavan, which is the fiercest form of Lord Shiva. This myth brings out an idea of penance and humility: Bhairavan faces a situation in which he performs his dance to atone for beheading Brahma. It emphasizes concepts of cosmic justice and the annihilation of pride



Theyyam-Dance of Gods

4. Muchilottu Bhagavathy Theyyam: This Theyyam belongs to the Vaniya community, and it explains to the people how a very powerful goddess safeguards her devotees. Thus, it shows that she is maintaining the moral order in society by doing justice to her kinsfolk.



Theyyam festival in Kerala

These characters do not act merely for the theatre; they have sacred ritualistic performances that invoke the presence of the divine. Every Theyyam, with its elaborate costume, vibrant make-up, and intricate dance form, brings to life these mythological tales which reinforce cultural values and collective memory in the community. The rich mythological heritage and religious traditions of Kerala are testified to by continued practices of Theyyam.

Cultural and Religious Background

Theyyam is a confluence of dance and music that takes its essence from a plethora of spiritual expressions—specifically, the belief systems in the Kannur and Kasaragod districts in northern Kerala—and thereby, the integration of Theyyam. Theyyam, it is said, has its historical roots in the Parasurama stage, where ritualistic festivals had been allocated to the aboriginal tribal communities of the Panan, Velan, and Vannan, according to Keralolpathi. Performing art is an eclectic manifestation of the cultural identity and spiritual practices of the above-mentioned

people, showcasing their devotional and social structure.

Theyyam and the Margins Ended

Theyyam is a very influential platform for several repressed communities like Malayas, Pulayas, Vannans, Velans, and Thiyyas. These lower groups of the caste hierarchy find in Theyyam an elaborate medium to relate cultural and spiritual stories. For example, one of the most popular performances, that of Pottan Theyyam, which embodies the Shaivite concept, characterizes the critique of the caste system and propagates equality and human dignity.

Ritualistic Practices

The ritualistic practices in Theyyam are elaborate and highly symbolic. Theyyam performances take place not in temples but in specially constructed sacred spaces called *Devasthanams* or *Kavu* (groves). The ceremonies start with the artist receiving betel leaves, areca nut, and rice in a banana leaf and then the invocation of



the deity through *Thidangal* or *Varavili*, which comprises the recitation of *Thottam* songs. The songs relate to the myths of the deities and help in bringing them into their presence. They help the performer to go into an almost trance state and become the deity in his performance and act. It's a process of personal and community devotion and thus a process of aesthetics and spirituality for the person seeing it.

Integration of Arts

Theyyam performance integrates three forms of art: music, dance, and painting. The music of Theyyam is an inseparable part where drums and cymbals fill the surroundings, accompanying the dance with the body movements. Dance gestures are very elaborate and involve the full-body approach with intricate, complicated steps conveying the storyline of the gods. The body of the performer has elaborate body painting, which are colourful costumes that go with the same. These elements of art are not in any way decorative but form the foundation of the spiritual and cultural value of the ritual, which enables both the practitioner and the audience to have an interface with the divine.



In other words, Theyyam is not just a performance; it is a hub that merges culture, religion, and art to act as an empowering tool for marginalized communities, an avenue to preserve the most ancient tradition, and an arena wherein diversified artistic evaluations gather. Through their colorful, vigorous presentations, Theyyam remains one of the life forces of Kerala's cultural heritage, providing an insightful view of the spiritual and social dividends of the land.

Development of Theyyam Masks

Historical Background

Evolution in the making of Theyyam masks is a reflection of its historical tapestry. At first, the masks are simple, made of materials such as the fronds of the coconut palms and the sheaths of areca nuts, exemplifying various divinities and spirits venerated in the region. Over hundreds of years, these masks have evolved both in complexity and artistic sophistication. The masks used in Theyyam performances nowadays are carefully made, with lots of detailing and designs showing several bright colors and patterns. A lot of them in the show represent the craftsmanship and cultural depth embedded in the tradition.



Early Theyyam Masks

Cultural Significance

Theyyam masks represent a rich part of Kerala's cultural heritage. They are not merely decorative pieces but form a part of the social and religious mores of the community. Attached to each mask is a different deity or legendary figure, at times assembling historical narratives with mythological tales. Masks representing *Vishnumoorthi* or *Gulikan*, for example, do not remain mere decorative pieces but unfold epic experiences and the wisdom of the ancestors through them. Ceremonial-cum-ritualistic functions and festivals were also ordinarily performed with the masks



Masks representing Vishnumoorthi



An immortal spirit believed to be divine, into a mortal body

Ritualistic Symbolism

The symbolic and spiritual values that Theyyam masks hold are immense. Such masks are designed for performances meant to invoke the presence of deities and spirits, whereby the wearer transcends the human identity into that of the divine. This is not a physical transformation but is believed to be spiritual as well. In Theyyam, the performer himself becomes a medium of divine messages and blessings. The masks often have symbolic meanings embedded into them in the various designs and colours used. Colours and patterns can express such attributes of a god as valour, wisdom, or protection. They offer a visual and spiritual medium, bonding the earth to the divine.

Theyyam masks are representative of that richness in heritage. It reflects the characteristics of the land of Kerala, identifying a historical, cultural, and spiritual dimension in their evolution from simple natural materials to symbolic artworks. It is not merely a decorative mask but a very important cultural artifact carrying the traditions, beliefs, and artistic excellence of this area. The masks of Theyyam retain the living legacy, keeping intact an old art form that continues to attract and inspire performers and audiences alike.

Theyyam Masks: A Craftsmanship

Art of Mask-Carving

The creation of Theyyam masks is an art form that requires a blend of traditional techniques and materials. Theyyam masks are primarily crafted from natural materials that are readily available in the region. Tender coconut leaves, areca nut sheaths, and softwood planks such as those from the murk tree are used for the construction of masks and headdresses by these artisans. Charcoal, turmeric, and rice powder are used to colour the masks in their usual bright hues. The carving is minute, and minute work



Traditional Mask

is done to ensure that each mask is an honest portrayal of the deity or spirit represented. Special significance is attached to the facial decorations, called '*mukhathezhuthu*.' Most of the time, facial decorations imitate features from animals, flowers, and mythological figures; they evoke awe, wonder, and reverence.

The local artisans, who are known as '*Kolakkaran*,' are traditionally knowledgeable about the art of Theyyam mask-making. In most cases, this skill and knowledge are passed down through generations in artisan families. Their expertise not only lies in the physical creation of masks but also in the symbolic and cultural meanings attached to every element used in making them. Hence, these artisans are greatly regarded because they succeed in turning these natural materials into sacred objects of deep spiritual significance to the community. In doing so, their work guarantees that Theyyam tradition can further grow, adjust to modern changes, and be at the heart of culture.

Styles of Theyyam mask carving have evolved over some time, reflecting changes in broader cultural and society. The initial masks were rather simple and also used more easily accessible materials. Still, when the form evolved, so did the masks—increasingly complex and sophisticated. There, in the intricacy of the designs of mask and headgear, one sees reflections of other classical arts like Kathakali and Krishnanattam in Theyyam masks today. New materials used in modern Theyyam performances and modern techniques make possible much more expression and variety in the design of masks. These changes, however, have in no way affected the main function of the mask: to transform the performer into a god, central to the ritual of Theyyam.

The Theyyam masks epitomize rich cultural heritage and artistic ingenuity of Kerala. Thus, the art of mask-carving, the dedicated role of artisans, and the evolving styles all contribute to the enduring legacy of Theyyam to ensure its continued relevance and reverence in contemporary society. This securely places the rather elaborate process of making such masks at the crossroads of history, culture, and spirituality.

Theyyam Masks during Performances

Role in Performance

Theyyam masks are therefore of great importance in enhancing both theatrical and ritual dimensions of Theyyam performances. These masks provide a visual spectacle that is mesmerizing and sacrosanct, whereby the performer shall be transformed into the very embodiment of the deity to which he is devoted. Elaborate, brightly coloured masks thus increase manifold the dramatic effect of performance, facilitating the transcendence of the performer's human identity to assume divine personae. The transformation is important in the sense that it creates an atmosphere thick with divinity and

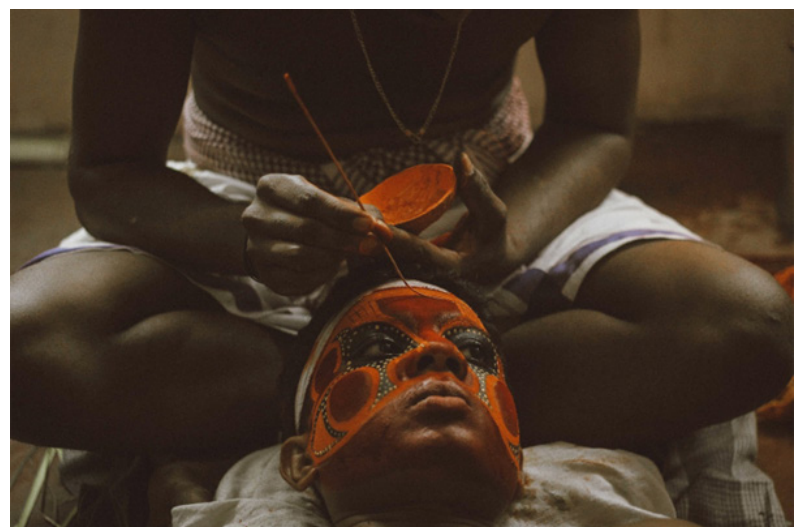
mysticism central to the ritualistic essence of Theyyam.

Character Representation

Theyyam masks involve intricate work in that they could be prepared to represent various legendary and mythic characters drawn from Hindu mythology and local legend. The qualities of a god or mythological character are represented by specific features of each mask. For example, 'Kundarachamundi' and 'Madechamundi' Theyyams are in bold outlines and bright colors to show their violent nature, which gives the effect of their strength and anger. Those for Vishnumoorthy Theyyam are detailed to bring out the genuineness and kindness of Vishnu. These graphical elements help in the identification and recognition of the character instantaneously and give power and significance to the performance.

Psychological and Emotional Impact on the Audience

The psychological and emotional impacts of the Theyyam masks are immense. Their overwhelming designs and their brilliant colours evoke emotions in the viewer that move through



Strong Expressions as represented in Theyyam



Pottan Theyyam, Organikos

a range of feelings, from being afraid to reverent and jubilant. The 'avataric' transformation of the performer into a deity with the help of the mask arouses huge visual and emotional responses among the viewers. This blurs the boundaries of the human and divine and thus facilitates a direct relation with the spiritual world. Further, the intensification through performance movements and ritualistic contexts creates an intense, cathartic experience for the audience. Thus, masks in the ritual performance of Theyyam could not be taken as an exclusive storytelling tool but served as a medium for spiritual and emotional engagement.

The masks are important to the performance, character representation, and audience effect of this traditional art form. They enhance the theatricality of the performance and facilitate the brilliant presentation of mythological characters. Thereby, creating a deep emotional and psychic

effect on the audience, rendering the Theyyam as a singularly strong cultural expression.

Theyyam masks not only form a work of art but bring along with them the age-old traditions, belief systems, and mythologies of the region. Every Theyyam performance mask takes in a story, a character, and a connection to the cultural heritage of Kerala. It is reflected in the intricate designs, bright colors, and symbolic elements of the masks, suggesting the soul of cultural identity in Kerala, a blend of folklore, spiritualism, and artistic flair.

Recently, more sincere efforts have been initiated and are being made to preserve and propagate Theyyam and its masks as an integral part of the rich cultural heritage of Kerala. Programs about the continuation of this ancient art form have been taken up in the form of documentation, training programs for mask-makers, and raising awareness amongst the new

generation about Theyyam and its importance. Theyyam is protected and promoted in Kerala just to retain a link with the past by paying respect and following up on age-old customs and rituals.

Theyyam has of late gained worldwide exposure and appreciation as part of its unique cultural heritage. International audiences, indeed, are spellbound by the riveting performance, detailed costumes, and obviously, the masks connected with the rituals of Theyyam. The exceptional craftsmanship and spiritual symbolism associated with the masks have whetted interest among people the world over in the rich cultural and artistic heritage of Kerala. In the face of increasing exposure at the global level, Theyyam brings to the forefront elements of Kerala's rich cultural heritage while promoting cross-cultural exchange and appreciation of diverse artistic traditions.

Theyyam masks represent a strong cultural identity of Kerala, carrying within them centuries of traditions and mythologies. In these times, when steps are taken to revive and popularize Theyyam, its preservation for generations to come becomes all the more pertinent. International recognition of Theyyam underlines its meaning on a much larger scale than its regional place because it places the cultural identity of Kerala before the global community and encourages an appreciation of rich artistic traditions.

Conclusion

The eye masks have been a part of the journey that testifies to deeply anchored traditions and artistic brilliance in the land of Kerala. The masks stand as symbolic reflections of the rich heritage of this region, imbued with stories, characters, and religious persuasions handed down through generations. Intricate designs and gaudy colors set it apart as a unique fusion of folklore, spirituality, and artistry that goes to define the very cultural identity of Kerala.



Theyyam and its masks represent a rich cultural heritage that has to be preserved at all costs. There is a need for continuous effort toward preserving this rich cultural tradition so that it can be passed on to future generations. The long-term survival of Theyyam, if documented, coupled with training programs and awareness campaigns, would identify rich roots in Kerala's past and perpetuate the rituals and practices that define its cultural landscape.

Looking ahead, prospects for both research and practice of Theyyam and its masks unfold promising developments. More research, collaborations, and innovations in techniques for making masks can help in preserving and propagating this unique cultural heritage that is Theyyam. Fidelity to the traditional heart of Theyyam coupled with modern tools and platforms propels into continued appreciation and recognition at the global level for this very ancient art form.

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Authors' Bio



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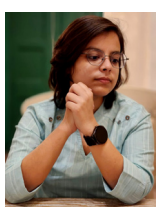
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**Purvasha Folk and Tribal Art Museum
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The ODI Art Center houses the Purvasha Folk and Tribal Art Museum, which showcases the rich collection of traditional artworks from various tribal communities in Odisha, including paintings, sculptures, textiles, wood art, terracotta and ceramics. The museum hosts cultural events, workshops, art residency programmes, research works on traditional culture and heritage and publishes research journals.

The Asian Traditional Culture Research Institute (ATCRI), the research wing of Odi Art Center conducts on research and publications related to Asian traditional culture and heritage. The 9th Chilika Shelduck International Folk Art Carnival, themed "Mask Traditions of Asia," contributed to the special issue of Merg ASIA journal on Asian mask dances.

The 10th carnival in November 2024, explored Asian percussion traditions. Articles are called for the next journal special issue on Asian percussion traditions.

**Last date for submission of articles: April 30, 2025
Articles to be submitted to odiartchilika@gmail.com.**





9th **Chilika Shelduck International Folk Carnival**
Odi Art Centre, Barakul, India

Organised during 9- 13 November, 2023

Theme: Mask Dances of Asia



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